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[BEAUTY'S SPELLS.]

A BURIED SIN;

OR,

HAUNTED LIVES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Kate Branksome's Poe," &c., &c.

PROLOGUE.

Alone, alone, all, all alone—
Alone on a wide, wide sea.

A WILD waste of sea.

White cliffs that turn to it, always, a frowning front. Cliffs that regard it ever as an insidious, encroaching enemy. Cliffs that never smile, but have a stern and rugged changelessness of aspect, as though they watched in fair weather, as in foul, for onsets which, in time of storm, slowly hollow great caves in their bases, which shake down, now and again, huge boulders and fragments of rock, which will succeed some day, in ages yet to come, in undermining their existence.

Between the cliffs and the sea there is a narrow strip of shore. Far away in the distance, where the cliffs sink until they are merged in the uniform level of the main-land, are the scattered houses of a little town.

Human eyes watching from the cliffs would not be keen enough to see a boat, with two men in it, launched from the beach abreast of the town. Human eyes would be caught by the

beauty of a changing purple sky, and would gaze, above and beyond, to where a golden sun sinks in a sea of blood.

There is a cunning old sea-gull high up in a crevice of the cliff who sees clearly enough, albeit with sleepy, blinking eyes. A cunning old sea-gull, who scents tempest in the air, who hears it in the moaning of the wind, who says to herself that birds are wise, that men are fools, that the rowers will have a trying time, and who contentedly buries her head in soft breast-feathers, wondering how long ere the warm eggs under her will become little fluffy balls of down, calling continually for food to gratify their voracious and insatiable appetites.

Night has come on—it is almost dark now. The moaning of the wind dies away in a sudden ominous lull as it collects all its strength for a mad rush across the waste of waters. To the music of splashing, beating waves the sea-gull sleeps peacefully.

High above her crevice a little shrub grows in an inch or two of soil upon a tiny ledge of the otherwise bare precipice. The shrub expands and flourishes to its own certain destruction. Its roots cannot strike into the rock, it has no hold save upon the soft earth. Its own increasing weight or a gust of wind will tear it away sooner or later and fling it down—down—to the shore beneath.

For the last week it has been tugging and tearing at its roots, for the strong wind has played with it roughly. To-night the supreme moment comes. In the lull of the wind, whilst not a breath stirs, its own weight supplies the final wrench, and it falls.

It brushes in its descent the whole length of the sea-gull's crevice, and the startled bird,

wakening with a hoarse scream, dashes out into the night. She has not gone many hundred yards ere she descries the boat which put out from the little town as the sun sank in a sea of blood.

She hates and mistrusts men—the sea-gull. She holds them to be fools and ignorant of many matters that birds know well; still, she has a wholesome dread of their power, and in her wise bird-mind she connects the unknown danger which threatened herself, her nest, and the fluffy balls of the future with this boat drifting idly shorewards. She flies round and round it, screaming defiance.

The two men talk on heedlessly. The oars lie at full length by their sides, the rowers have so changed position as to face each other. One tells excitedly a tale which moves him to sorrow, to indignation, to fierce, burning wrath—one listens, with bowed head, as though he were accused. Far away through the darkness twinkle the lights of the little town.

The tale is ended. He of the bowed head begins to speak. The broken voice is one of penitent confession. He who told the tale rises wrathfully, grasping an oar as though it were a club.

The penitent starts to his feet likewise. The boat rocks from side to side. He who grasps the oar swings it round his head; it cuts the air like a scimitar. With crushing force it strikes the other just below the ear. Like a stone he drops over the side, disappearing beneath a white, crested wave.

The assailant throws down his oar, shudderingly, and steps across the seat to the place. With anxious eyes he tries to pierce the blackness. He would give ten years of his life to see

a head rise to the surface within reach. But it does not. There is only the black water, flecked here and there with white foam. He calls aloud, and listens, with beating heart, for an answer. There is only the sea-gull's cry, screaming—Murder!

For long, long minutes, that seem like hours, he peers into the darkness, and calls aloud. In vain.

At length he turns his eyes to the distant lights, and feels mechanically for the cars. There is but one!

He searches up and down the boat, but without success. An oar has disappeared. It is the one he threw down shudderingly when his companion fell overboard.

The tide has turned and is fast carrying him out to sea. Large rain-drops begin to fall, forerunners of a thunder-storm. Apathetically, he surrenders himself to his fate. With but one oar it is impossible to make the town; with the load of guilt upon his conscience it were almost better to die than face the questions which would be asked him.

The sea-gull hies back to her warm nest in the crevice, convinced that, for the present, danger is over. The storm breaks—great waves come rolling in thunderingly. Lurid lightning-flashes reveal them, rank after rank, dashing up to renew the old battle with the cliffs.

And when the morning breaks serene and beautiful, when the sea, with gentle murmuring, has fallen to play again with the stones and the shells, a boat is discovered, keel uppermost, grating on the shore just opposite the gaunt cliffs.

It is a principle of creation that the stronger should prey upon the weaker, that lesser lives should daily be sacrificed to sustain greater ones. To the old fishermen, who gather round the boat and discuss the probable fate of its late occupants, the sea itself is a monster, strong, deceitful, greedy, whose clutches they have often escaped by a miracle. In the great ocean-life two more human ones have been swallowed, that is all.

For the two comrades who rowed in perfect amity towards the golden sunset into the sea of blood are never heard of more.

CHAPTER I.

A PEER'S PERPLEXITIES.

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child.

It is a grand thing, no doubt, to be a lord. It is a grand thing to have a rent-roll of thousands—to look, from the tower of the rambling old castle your ancestors were so proud of in their time, upon miles of park, and farm, and forest, knowing they are all your own.

It is a grand thing to have the servile worship of base-born men, to be pointed and stared at, to be flattered and fawned upon, to reign as a king in your own country, upon your own estate, having all the pleasures of royalty and none of its cares.

But all this grandeur does not necessarily entail happiness. It may be questioned whether any peasant toiling in his fields, any keeper trapping vermin in his woods, any shepherd tending flocks upon his hills exhibits so gloomy a countenance this sunny morning as does Harold, tenth Earl of Malbreckthane.

He sits in a magnificent library. There are books everywhere, tiers upon tiers of them. Books in every variety of binding, of all thickness, of all ages, of all languages almost. They fill a room to which a scholar would turn lovingly, as to a classic Paradise.

The collection is the most renowned private one in England. It has rare monastic manuscripts written on vellum, and of priceless value, copies of which do not exist. It has the works of almost every author of celebrity, ancient or modern. But Harold, tenth Earl of Malbreckthane, is not a studious man.

He sits in that magnificent library, but no tome lies open before him. He never goes there to read.

His lot has fallen upon evil times, or, rather, for the times are well enough, he and the century were strangely unsuited to each other in his hot youth; and as no one ever ventured to suggest the reverse, he remains of opinion that the century was in fault.

He would have made a splendid freebooting baron of the Middle Ages, fierce and truculent, with a rough tongue to flout his neighbour, and a sharp sword to settle the dispute.

Right gaily he would have summoned his vassals, have donned his armour, have ridden away at his liege's back, giving never a thought to the justice of the quarrel, but ready at a moment's notice to slit the foemen's jugulars, or to bleed to death himself like the great bullock that he was, until age and sorrow modified his natural disposition.

But the nineteenth century is not as were the good old days of his mailed fathers, whose portraits smirk and frown in the gallery yonder, whose ashes crumble in the family vault, whose stone effigies pray ceaselessly with clasped hands in the village church.

For the shaft of wit has taken the place of the glancing arrow, polished satire that of burnished steel, sharp tongue thrusts deal wounds as painful, and well nigh as deadly sometimes, as did the lances of yore.

And in these encounters the earl did not shirk. In any brilliant festive gathering of his peers he became slow of speech, his ideas moved sluggishly, his few attempts at humour were ponderous as the playful gambollings of an elephant.

Only in the society of inferiors, at feasts of his own providing, where his coarse jests were cheered to the echo, and his unpolished utterances were repeated with fulsome adulation, did my lord feel conscious of social success.

So he made many such feasts, and lived a life which hardly became a nobleman, until he fell in love.

Strange to say, the object of his passion was a refined gentlewoman—stranger still, she truly returned his affection, and she became his wife.

Then the shield of a woman's wit began to be interposed between my lord and his more courtly critics.

Her loving homage carried with it the respect and even admiration of the county. As encircling ivy hides the roughness of the gnarled old oak, so did her wifely tenderness conceal the flaws and blemishes of his character.

Alas, alas! not for long.

There came a day when angels sat on either side the bed in the great Blue Chamber—Life and Death; when the one brought from the mysterious spirit-world a child-soul to animate a little red, struggling mass of wailing humanity; when the other stretched a conducting hand to a freed woman-soul and passed with her to that bourne whence no traveller returns.

Harold, tenth Earl of Malbreckthane, went mad for a time.

So said the nurse, who essayed to lead him where lay the coveted heir to wealth and titles, for he broke into wild imprecations against the babe whose feeble life had cost the mother her existence.

So said the priest who tried to comfort the stricken man with pious platitudes, who murmured something about the Lord having given and taken away, and who was forthwith driven from the room with fierce, blasphemous curses.

So said the world when the walls of Freston Castle re-echoed, not many months after its lady's death, with coarse jest and drunken song, when the guests of the ancient house (which had been wont to entertain the highest nobles in the land) were abandoned women and profligate debauchees; when the widowed earl's laughter was loudest, his conversation the most profane, his freaks and follies the ones nearest approaching insanity.

He was mad, if you will, mad with grief.

His fierce and almost brutal nature was capable only of sorrow fierce and brutal likewise—sorrow which invited men's disgust, but which may have moved angels to deepest pity.

He made no moan, he shed no tears, but the

food upon his plate was tasteless, the wine had no flavour, in its depths there lay no pleasure, only temporary oblivion.

He drank—the game—he baited badgers and bears, he set the law and public opinion at defiance, he held private prize fights in his own grounds, he rode horses as mad and unruly as his own spirit, and broke their legs or necks over stone walls and impossible watercourses (never coming to serious grief himself), until his name was a by-word in the land. And so the years went by, and at length the demon that possessed him was exorcised.

First, he set his house in order. He drove out the revellers, one and all. He reformed existing abuses and made restitution for past ones, so far as lay in his power. He discharged the entire staff of menials, most of them as disreputable as their master, and instituted a decorous household. Finally, he invited Mrs. Carew to assume the control of the new establishment.

To say that Mrs. Carew was a person of severe and unblemished reputation, of the highest and most unimpeachable respectability, is but faintly to shadow forth the truth. She was a distant cousin of his own, the widow of a distinguished general, the leader of a certain exclusive set, to whose society the highest rank or fashionable material was not a passport, but a whisper questioned the moral character of the aspirant. For ten years the county families had not darkened the doors of Freston Castle; within a fortnight of Mrs. Carew's arrival not one had failed to make overtures of reconciliation.

The callers were at a loss to conceive (and politely anxious to extract) her motives for trusting her immaculate self in a place redolent with such unsavoury and uncongenial associations.

The best of motives they confessed afterwards. It was too terrible to think of little Lord Ferrars and little Lady Clare running wild as they had done all their lives. It was "charmingly unselfish," and "quite too angelic of dear Mrs. Carew to devote herself to the little wretches, in the faint hope of making them respectable members of society."

Of that trifling consideration of eight hundred pounds per annum, paid quarterly by the earl's bankers to her account, no mention was made; and if some arrangement of the kind were suspected, the visitors were much too well bred to express their suspicions. As to certain ulterior designs, hidden deep in the astute lady's brain, nobody divined their existence.

So she took up her abode at Freston Castle, and presently cultured governesses and renowned masters were engaged, who taught Miss Blanche Carew every accomplishment under the sun. Lady Clare just as much as she chose to learn, and Lord Ferrars nothing.

The children had so run riot in the old days of unchecked freedom it was a simple impossibility to bring them into wholesome subordination.

They would climb the highest trees with equal activity, and the same superb superiority to considerations connected with the wardrobe, in search of birds' nests. They would ride the wildest horses in the stables bare-backed, or by some ingenious device frighten within an inch of his life the groom who presumed to prevent them. They would defy every person within the castle, save their irate father, and himself without it, inciting him to chase them down trimly kept paths and over Dutch flower-beds, whilst groaning gardeners looked on aghast, until they reached a sheet of ornamental water, with an islet in the centre. The islet was their city of refuge. If hard pressed neither of them would hesitate to wade and swim to it, whether in July heat or in December snow.

To tell truth, the earl's opposition to the children's vagaries in the days when they might have been altered to his will was but half-hearted. He liked them to be active, bold, hardy, fearless. Dormant instincts in his own blood were stirred to quick sympathy with their lawlessness, and he granted them their way with but faint opposition. It was a mistake, but the discovery of his error came too late.

It dawned upon him, shortly before Mrs. Carew's advent, that childhood was merging into youth, and that no hind's son was more illiterate than his; that no peasant's daughter could be more ignorant than Lady Clare Darrell.

Worse than this, little Lord Ferrars, aged ten, could smoke a cigar, toss down a bumper of claret, or swear a round oath, with as bad a grace as the worst profligate who assisted the castle's master to turn it into a Pandemonium.

And little Lady Clare, aged twelve, a child still in perfect innocence and ignorance of things evil, had caught tricks of manner, of gesture, and of speech from the flaunting women who reigned as goddesses amid the revelry, which awakened even my lord of Malbreckthame to a sense of the unfitness of things.

Hence Mrs. Carew's installation.

But the mischief was done, and in such effectual fashion that neither man nor woman could be found to undo it.

The Malbreckthame purse was deep, its strings were held by no niggard hand. Tutor after tutor, tempted by the liberal terms, did his very best to mould the Malbreckthame clay into fine porcelain, and failed. Long before the first processes were complete the moulders were baffled, outwitted, and driven away in despair.

Lady Clare's case was not quite hopeless.

For one thing, she was fond of *Blanche Carew*, and would sometimes share her studies, either because *Blanche* entreated or for sheer love of that young lady's company.

And when she wished to learn she did so with a quickness of apprehension, a retentiveness of memory, a temporary untiring perseverance, that achieved results simply marvellous.

But Lord Ferrars was altogether impracticable. He simply declined to read or even to look at the books which were set before him.

Some of the tutors hit upon the idea that information might be conveyed casually, in conversation, after the method adopted by Mr. Barlow in "Sandford and Merton."

They did not many times repeat the experiment.

Lord Ferrars divined the ruse in an instant, and resented the trickery with righteous indignation.

The casting of the first titbit of knowledge to him, however ingeniously wrapped up, was invariably the signal for a violent outbreak.

He would execute a wild Indian war dance round the unhappy tutor. He would yell and laugh, and snap his fingers in contemptuous derision. He would indulge in a series of savage onslaughts, with the avowed intention of running a long pin into the legs of the miserable instructor, or of performing some equally humane operation; and he would finish by devising an ingenious and generally successful plot to render his victim's life a burden for a day or two.

After a dozen or more tutors had resigned the earl sent his son to Eton.

At this celebrated school the boy-lord's career was brilliant, audacious, but short—very short.

It began by mutiny in class, rigidly repressed; and a course of pugilistic engagements out of it. It continued in an adoption of Guy Fawkes's notable scheme for the regeneration of parliament.

Doubtless the ancient seminary retains abuses as heinous as the parliamentary ones against which ardent reformers inveigh, but the authorities were prejudiced against Lord Ferrars's summary treatment; they liked to do the blowing up themselves.

Accordingly, they confiscated the squibs, crackers, fireworks, and gunpowder with which the promising young gentleman had proposed to enliven them, and they expelled the delinquent.

Since then he had twice been sent to private schools, and removed by the urgent desire of the principals. Now, at seventeen years of age, he was the scandal of the county.

True, there was not within thirty miles a finer shot, a bolder rider across country, a better wrestler, boxer, or runner of his age and weight.

But it was not less true that there was not within the same radius a more ignorant, savage,

reckless, foul-tongued reprobate than could be when he chose (as he often did) Viscount Ferrars, heir to the earldom of Malbreckthame and to the finest estate in the shire.

From the open windows of the library, where the earl sits amid the accumulated book wisdom of all ages, his heir can be discerned upon the lawn engaged in a congenial pastime, namely, boxing with a sturdy stable-helper.

It is an upright, lissom figure on which the watcher gazes; tall, handsome, with promise of great strength in the broad shoulders, in the deep chest, in the muscular arms. A father's face might well brighten at sight of the youth's glad, vigorous life, but the earl's visage darkens and darkens as he looks.

He loves his son, Heaven knows. He is proud of him, in a fierce, concealed manner; and yet bitterly ashamed. For he knows that the boy's faults are his own faults, exaggerated and multiplied by unwise training.

And he knows also, that if he, the Earl of Malbreckthame, fell upon an unfortunate age, the times will be yet more evil for his heir.

For in that far-off riotous life when he also was a stripling, some repute and honour had come to him amongst his own set. Men still drank hard, lived fast, brawled amongst themselves, and settled their quarrels by fisticuffs or by pistols, so that his brute courage and animal strength served him well, in early manhood at least.

But now when passion wore a mask of indolence, when all emotion is hidden by cynical indifference, when education is forced to the highest intellectual standard, when the most fashionable creed is nil admirari, what chance will this wayward, turbulent lordling have when once he runs loose in the world, to be derided by keener wits, to be fawned upon by cunning knaves, to be flattered, hoodwinked, plucked, be-fooled by the devil's ministers?

Of the girl the earl does not think so much. She is yet young, she is beautiful with a certain, wild, disordered loveliness of her own. He can dower her handsomely, for the Malbreckthame gold is countless. She will marry well, no doubt, and there will be an end to his cares.

But the son, the heir, the inheritor of title and fortune. My lord's heart is very heavy this sunny morning with a weight of weary apprehension.

Of late years he has done his duty according to his lights; not as better men, or cleverer men, or men of firmer will might have done it, but still—according to his lights.

And the result? Insubordination—rebellion—open defiance. A terrible sliding scale, and full of evil omen for the future.

He is not given to deep thought, that is the attribute of your poets and your scholars. He is not given to peevish fretfulness, that belongs to weak women and narrow-chested men. He is not given to cowardly forebodings, that is for madmen and enthusiasts. He is not given now to gusts of stormy passion, to threats and upbraidings, for they widen the breach between himself and his "Absalom."

But black Care sits ever on his brow. A dark shadow falls ever between himself and the sunshine. Even the cry of the hounds, that sweetest music of all in years gone by, has lost its charm.

Ah! It is a grand thing doubtless to be a lord. But it may be that many a labourer, could he change places for a month, would go back with a relish to his plough and his harrow, his hunk of cheese and his crust of bread, his fat bacon and his draught of skimmed milk, nor ever wish again to be the Earl of Malbreckthame.

CHAPTER II.

"A FEW MORE THORNS."

There is a method in man's wickedness,
It grows up by degrees.

"My lord, Farmer Dayzell desires the honour of an interview."

"Show him in."

It is generally understood that at this hour of the morning the earl is to be found in the library, converted for the nonce into an audience-chamber.

Afloat upon a sea of rich, soft carpeting, Farmer Dayzell gives one the impression of a landsman adrift on troubled waters without sail or oar.

He pulls his fore-lock reverently and stands speechless, looking at his gigantic boots. They have been brushed clean by fragrant meadow-grass in the green ways by which he came. They have been subjected to severe scrutiny, and to rough treatment upon a door-mat in the hall. Nevertheless they look strangely out of place on the costly velvet pile, and he regards them suspiciously, vaguely mistrustful that they may damage it.

"Sit down, man, sit down."

Farmer Dayzell pulls his fore-lock again, and thinks he knows his manners too well to be seated in his noble landlord's presence.

"Thank'ee, my lord, I'd rather stand."

"Well, what is the matter? Anything wrong with the beasts?"

Farmer Dayzell remembers his errand and his injuries. The sturdy Saxon blood in him asserts itself. He forgets the incongruity of his clumsy boots with the magnificence around. He draws himself up, every inch a man, and looks the questioner in the face with fearless blue eyes that sparkle angrily.

"It's the Welsh sheep, my lord."

"Ah, those Welsh sheep are always a nuisance, jumping hedges like antelopes, and straying like Saul's asses," says the earl, not particularly happy in his smiles. "Have they got into the park again?"

Farmer Dayzell recollects that his last errand to the castle was to make excuses for damage done. The recollection is unwelcome, seeing that his present mission is one of complaint.

"Tain't that, my lord. I mended the gaps i' the hedges myself, and got your lordship's carpenter to look to the broken gate. No, no, they were shut in safe enough, if they'd bin left to themselves."

"What is it, then?"

Farmer Dayzell groans.

"It's a matter of ten pound, my lord, and that won't cover it. Ten pound, and I ain't the one as can lose the money and not feel it. The good Lord do know what be coming to we farmers, what wi' the bad yield, and the bad price, and the rinderpest, and the—"

"Well, well, I am no wiser as to the nature of your misfortune."

"Tain't a misfortune, my lord," retorts Mr. Dayzell, wrathfully, "I call it real downright villany, axing yer lordship's pardon for speakin' so of your own flesh and blood."

"What has he done?" asks the earl, quietly. The personal pronoun is preceded by no noun to which it refers, but the omission strikes neither speaker as peculiar.

"It were yestere'en, my lord. I had been down to the village to see the smith about a job o' shoeing, when as I come through Dingley Bottom on my way home I heerd somebody a shakin' his sides wi' laughin'."

"It were Lord Ferrars; and that great mongrel o' his'n were a-chasin' my Welsh sheep. Four as beautiful lambs, my lord, as ever your lordship clapped eyes on, to say nothin' of having hustled and bustled the rest of the flock, till no one can say how much it ha' put them back. And all Lord Ferrars said was—says he:

"'It's the best bit of sport I have had for weeks, Dayzell.'"

The earl looks through the open window at the struggling figures in the distance. Across the lawn comes a burst of the same ringing laughter which so excited Farmer Dayzell's ire. Lord Ferrars has just put all his strength into a clean left-hander, knocking the stable-helper head over heels upon the soft turf.

"What is your actual damage, Dayzell, as nearly as you can estimate it?"

"The carcasses, they be worth summut, my lord, but then some of the other sheep are bit-

ten. It will take all a ten-pun note to cover the loss, that it will."

The earl draws a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocks a drawer of the table at which he sits, and produces a little packet of Bank of England notes, crisp and clean. He selects one, and pushes it across the table.

"There you are, Dayzell. That covers the loss at your own valuation; I do not wish for a second. The opinion of one honest, straightforward man is sufficient."

Farmer Dayzell scratches his head, and looks at the note dubiously.

"Thank'ee kindly, my lord. The sheep be done a mort of harm to, sartin sure. But they may get over it pretty well, and my mind it do misgive me for oversettin' the damage."

"There—there—the better luck yours. Good day."

At this significant hint of dismissal Farmer Dayzell pulls his forelock again and retires.

A gentle tap comes to the door, and it opens, admitting no less a personage than the housekeeper of Preston Castle. She is very florid, very stout, very elaborately attired in rustling black silk, and she advances with a succession of little bows, supposed to be courtesies.

"Pray take a seat, Mrs. Dampwick. No very alarming business, I trust?"

Mrs. Dampwick deposits her portly frame in a substantial chair, coughs behind a white handkerchief, and enlarges that handkerchief with a transparent affectation of being about to blush.

"Not alarming, my lord, but embarrassing, and delicate—very delicate."

The earl's eyes twinkle a little under his shaggy brows.

"Then it is about Jones, the chemist, eh?"

Mrs. Dampwick drops the handkerchief and becomes very erect indeed.

"My lord, I trust I respect myself too much to mention to anyone the name of that misguided young man."

The misguided young man, a youth of about forty summers, after a vigorous siege by Mrs. Dampwick, lasting almost as long as that of Troy, has recently succumbed to the bright eyes of an artful woman half as old as himself, and has positively submitted to be led in triumph to the altar.

"It is not of my own affairs I wish to speak, my lord; it is about Clara Markham."

"Who is she?"

"One of the under housemaids, my lord; a very pretty girl. You must have noticed her."

"Rather tall, with black eyes and eyelashes, and a merry look about her mouth?"

"That's her, my lord," replies the housekeeper, with ungrammatical corroboration.

"Well, what of Clara Markham?"

"I want your lordship's advice."

"A less expensive mission than my last visitor's," mutters the earl.

"You see, my lord, Clara is good-looking, and vain, like all young, pretty things. She and a lad in the village have kept company some time, and this autumn they were to marry. But Lord Ferrars has taken a little notice of the girl lately, and it turns her head. Twice I have seen him kiss her on the stairs, and pay her a compliment. A clodhopper's kisses and soft speeches don't go well after a lord's. There is no harm in it, but the servants begin to talk. Some fool has carried the tale to Reuben Holt in the village, and now he passes her with a scornful face, without speaking; and she, poor, silly thing, puffed up with vanity and pride, don't seem to care."

The earl's face darkens as he listens. Turning it to the green lawn (where the combatants rest awhile, and drink great horns of cider with equal zest), to the sweep of far-off hills, to the brightness and breadth of the June sunshine, memories crowd upon him of his own lost youth. Memories of light words tossed at first as idle tribute to some lowly beauty's loveliness, that found such ready answer in kindling cheeks and sparkling eyes they came to be repeated with warmth and earnestness. Memories of caresses, careless at first, which became in time hot—passionate—deadly.

There is a sting in such recollections. My

lord of Malbreeckthane comes back to the present with fretful irritation in his tones.

"Really, Mrs. Dampwick, it seems to me you are unlucky in a choice of a confidant. Surely Mrs. Carew is the proper person to consult."

"Begging your pardon, my lord, Mrs. Carew is one of those ladies who could make no allowance for a young girl's thoughtlessness. She would be horrified at the idea of any respectable young woman letting herself be kissed on the stairs. She would send her packing, my lord, bag and baggage, and perhaps ruin the poor thing's character for life."

It is true, as he knows well. The earl is not blessed with much discernment, but he has not lived sixty years in this wicked world without learning that of all judges of her sex's foibles the female Pharisee is the hardest and the harshest.

"What do you propose, then?"

"With your permission, my lord, I should like to see Lady Jocelyn's housekeeper. We are very friendly, and she is a discreet person, whom I could trust. If we could arrange an exchange of housemaids on some excuse or other. Clara Markham would be placed out of harm's way and no fuss made; and probably it would all come right with her sweetheart."

"Certainly. A capital plan. Order a carriage when you like, and consider you have my full approval and authority for any arrangement you may think proper to make, Mrs. Dampwick."

The housekeeper withdraws, a little fluttered and flattered by the cordial approbation of her master's manner.

"What next?" the earl wonders; he is very weary of the changes that are continually being rung upon one theme, his son's misdoings.

A footman brings a card upon a silver salver. The Rev. Felix Pendexter.

The earl rises and extends his hand rather stiffly. The Rev. Felix Pendexter is the clergyman whose ghostly consolations were so unceremoniously rejected seventeen years ago, and neither gentleman has forgotten the circumstance.

The priest, when he recalls that savage malediction, unrepented of, unatoned, which once drove him from the stricken noble's presence in pious horror, thinks of him as a wandering sheep of midnight blackness, accursed of God, abhorred of man.

The noble, when he looks on the priest's face (which is seldom, for his sacrifices to respectability do not include attendance at divine service, unhappily) has a feeling which he cannot put into words, but which is not the less real. It is as though the wraith of dead pain beckoned him to a silent room, and pointed with shadowy finger to a white face with a cruel, stony, everlasting calm upon it; the face of the one woman he ever really loved.

"I am reluctant to acquaint your lordship with the object of my visit. I do so, I may say, under a painful sense of duty."

The earl bows.

"Yesterday, at morning service, I was distracted in the middle of prayers by the extreme inattention of such of my congregation as sat near the door."

With a hazy reminiscence of sundry yawning half-hours in times long gone by, the earl thinks that if his inattention had manifested itself during the sermon it might be held excusable; but he keeps the reflection to himself.

"As you are perhaps aware" (dubiously) "the door is always left wide open in summer."

"Yes."

"All eyes were towards it. Several frivolous young women began to giggle violently. I am told that a dog was incited to enter the church, and that he wandered several times up and down the aisle. The strains of 'Rory O'Moore,' in a shrill whistle, were distinctly audible to me at the lectern."

The clergyman pauses, by way of giving effect to his graphic picture, and perhaps hoping to elicit an exclamation of horror. If so, he is disappointed.

"I had to order the clerk to shut the door, and he did it, with much noise and difficulty, for the

sabbath breaker thrust a piece of wood between the hinges, which the man, being old and near-sighted, did not discover for some time. The reckless profaner of God's day and God's house was your son, Lord Ferrars."

The earl bows again. The Reverend Felix looks at him angrily, indignant at his unsympathetic silence.

"Surely it is unnecessary I should endeavour to awaken your lordship's apprehension of paternal duty."

"What duty, Mr. Pendexter?"

"To restrain your son in the violation of laws human and divine, more particularly the latter," cries the priest, warmly. "Lord Ferrars's behaviour in the church is unpardonable, sacrilegious, blasphemous. And the mischief of so high an evil doer's example is incalculable."

"I deplore the evil behaviour and the bad example, but I am simply powerless to prevent their repetition."

"Powerless!"

"Quite so. I am sorry to confess, Mr. Pendexter, that my boy's father has less influence with him than the merest stranger."

A transient emotion of pity for the rich and powerful nobleman softens the priest's heart toward him.

"What is to be done, then? Can you suggest any course?"

"None, unless you feel inclined to try your own persuasive powers"—and the earl glances through the open window—"but, I warn you, he is as likely as not to invite you to single combat with those same boxing gloves, the issue to decide the question of further irreverent interruptions. He would doubtless consider you bound either to accept or to confess yourself an unworthy member of the church militant."

The Rev. Felix Pendexter glances across the lawn to where Lord Ferrars and the stable-helper are having five minutes' "rough and tumble" by way of concluding the morning's pastime. The helper is a perfect giant, twice his opponent's weight, sturdy, thickset, with brawny arms like a blacksmith's, the hard muscle standing out in knotted cordage. In this description of boxing superior strength gives him the advantage, and he has had so much the worst of the encounter hitherto he is eager to make the most of it.

His blows fall like the strokes of a flail, but they are parried or evaded. Lord Ferrars springs round him, cool, alert, awaiting his opportunity. It comes—a quick blow, delivered with lightning speed, straight from the shoulder, and the helper lies prostrate.

The clergyman turns away, shuddering faintly. For a second imagination places him in the helper's place, and he sees himself occupying an undignified and unclerical position prone on the soft turf.

"There is nothing to be done then," he says, sadly.

"Nothing."

So priest and peer shake hands and separate, and the earl muses for a time, deep in reflection.

"I will give him another chance," he mutters, "but Abercrombie and Darrell shall help me to select the next tutor."

"You have hitherto chosen from the wrong sex, my lord," says a voice behind him, a voice of cold severity, frigid, emotionless, unsympathetic.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Carew?"

Mrs. Carew responds with a question.

"Do you remember a period in your own early history," she asks, "when your career was one to cause your friends deep anxiety?"

My lord of Malbreeckthane winces at the interrogation. It arouses memories which haunt his life—unquiet ghosts of the past, which are ever ready to lift their shadowy hands and point at him with silent accusation.

"Well?" he answers, gruffly.

"What brought about your reformation?"

"My marriage."

"The inference is easy," says Mrs. Carew.



[BACK TO LIFE.]

*Nothing but a happy marriage can save Ferrars from ruin."

My lord's thoughts revert hastily to his previous conversation with Mrs. Dampwick, the housekeeper, and he mutters, with bated breath, a word or two that are not intended for Mrs. Carew's aristocratic ears. He believes that if his hopeful son were asked at this instant to define a happy marriage, he would do so as a union with Clara Markham, the under housemaid.

Mrs. Carew turns to the window and watches a young girl who is crossing the stretch of lawn. Her swift movements are singularly graceful, yet dignified; the June sunshine glints on the yellow gold of her uncovered head, and as she laughingly seizes Lord Ferrars's hand and begins to untie the strings of his boxing glove, one may see that she is very sweet and fair. It is Blanche Carew.

"They make a handsome couple, do they not?" comments her mother.

The frigid tones are less emotionless than usual, they have a ring of meaning, and the earl detects it.

"Is it possible you have thought he might marry Blanche?"

It would be Mrs. Carew's turn to wince at the directness of the question if her strong features were wont to tell tales. She has led the first card in a game upon which all her hopes are staked, but at present it would not be wise to show her hand.

"He is much too young to marry anybody, and, certainly, I should not dare to confide Blanche's happiness to his keeping."

"The love and the influence of such a girl might save him," says the earl, thoughtfully.

And Mrs. Carew turns away lest any trace of the exultation she feels may be visible. Of the game upon which all her hopes are staked the first trick is hers.

(To be Continued.)

A SPRIG OF MISTLETOE: A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A Pretty Angler," "A Mysterious Husband,"
"A Little Love Chat," "Won Without
Wooing," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XVI.

BURDENED WITH A LOVER.

Oh! fly with me—my little barque is waiting 'neath the steep,
And the midnight breeze is fresh to waft thee o'er the stilly deep,
Though tempests blow they should not raise thy fears, nor scathe thy form,
For love should hover o'er thee still—a halo in the storm.

Lois arose to her feet and stood trembling before the form she feared was not of this world, and well the haggard looks of Paul Legarde justified her terror.

But he was of flesh and blood. It was the Paul who had gone away a few months before, only changed by suffering and bowed down by fatigue.

"I fear I have startled you, Miss Lawstocke," he said. "Where is Vida?"

"And you are alive?" she said, drawing in a deep breath.

"Yes, I still live, but that is all," he replied. "But tell me, where is Vida?"

"First let me correct you on a point that concerns myself. I am Miss Lawstocke no longer—I have become Mrs. Wadmore."

"You have married Cater Wadmore?"

"I have."

"Accept my congratulations," Paul said. "I hope you are happy."

Lois cast down her eyes and sighed. Already

she had laid her plans, and was beginning to exercise her arts.

The woman could recover from a shock as an elastic ball from which pressure is removed resumes its shape.

"I have no right to complain," she said, "my husband seeks to gain my love, but—but—I thought you were dead."

"And I have been at death's door," he said.

"It was only by a miracle I escaped. The scoundrels who fell upon me left me for dead, but a peasant girl took pity on me. She found me lying in the roadway with scarce a breath of life in me, and carried me to a cave, where she nursed me in secret and brought me back to life."

"The second edition of Haidée and Don Juan."

Paul's face flushed a little as he received this thrust. It was intended to wound him, and it succeeded, but he looked at her with fearless eyes as he replied:

"I have nothing to reproach myself with regarding Azai."

"That is the name of the girl who saved you?"

"It is."

"I suppose she was pretty?"

"She was beautiful and good."

Lois checked a contemptuous laugh that rose to her lips, knowing it would make Paul indignant, and passed over his assertion in silence.

He chafed a little at her implied doubt, but turned again to the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Where is Vida?" he asked. "I want to see her before I meet with the others."

"You appear to be in utter ignorance of what has transpired during your absence."

"I have posted across the Continent as fast as I could," he replied, "aided by funds lent me by a Good Samaritan. It was useless for me to follow the embassy and I returned. It was only on landing in England that I knew that a report of my death had been circulated. I hastened on

to contradict it in person. Again—where is Vida?"

"Not here," Lois replied. "The Haverlands have left Haganhaugh."

"Left Haganhaugh?"

"Yes; it is now our place. We bought it at the sale."

"But, great Heavens!" exclaimed Paul, with a bewildered look, "how came such a change about?"

"The colonel mixed himself up in some rash speculations and was ruined. Beaumont has sold out, and—the whole family," a pause of a second or so to give emphasis to the lie, "have left for Australia."

Paul sank into a chair with a groan of dismay.

"To think," he said, "that I should have come too late to save them. Had I remained at home I would have purchased Haganhaugh and saved them. A curse upon that embassy business."

Lois turned her face away and smiled. With certain facts in her possession she was in a position to work out her own ends whatever they might be.

Of the return of the piece of mistletoe she was sure Paul knew nothing, not so much as she did, and all she knew of it was that it had been done by the agency of her husband.

In any case she was determined that Paul and Vida should not meet again if she could help it.

The hand she held was full of trumps, and if she played them well her game was assured.

"And did they go without first assuring themselves of my death?" Paul asked.

"I doubt if they even heard of it," Lois deliberately replied, "or would have troubled themselves about it if they had. Vida was the lightest-hearted of them all when she went away, for when the rich young colonist came here on a visit—"

"Who was he?" asked Paul, abruptly.

"I forget. He did not come until after you were gone. He and Vida were very good friends, and as they went away with him—"

Paul's face was now livid, and it seemed as if the hand of death had come upon him. Lois, alarmed, stayed her fictitious narrative and rushed to his side.

"How thoughtless of me," she said, "you are ill and weary. You have need of something to strengthen you. Let me ring for a little wine."

"Leave me for a few minutes," Paul moaned.

"I must be alone, my brain is in a whirl."

She thought it best to obey him, but she bound him to wait for her to return.

"You will not spirit yourself away," she said, "for I am your true friend, and may be able to help you."

"I have no other, Heaven knows," he groaned.

"You need not fear my leaving. I could not if I would. The little life I had seems to have left me. Give me ten minutes alone, and then I will obey you in all things."

And all this time she had not thought of Captain Martingale. He and the appointment made with him were alike forgotten, and as she, with a lurid light in her eyes, was hastening towards the breakfast-room in search of her husband the disappointed lover, with shame clinging to him like a shroud, was returning to the wife he had betrayed so bitterly in thought if not in deed.

Cater Wadmore had not eaten a very good breakfast, the perusal of several letters that came in by the post having apparently interfered with his digestion.

He had fumed and muttered as he read them, and when he heard the light footstep of his wife outside he thrust them into his pocket and tried to compose his ruffled features.

The effort was not conspicuously successful, but Lois was too busy with her own thoughts to heed him much. It was a long time since he had seen her face so radiant. It was literally without a cloud.

"Why, Lois!" he exclaimed, "you look as if an unexpected legacy had come to you."

"The air here," she said, "agrees with me."

Then, feeling that she had been indiscreet in

showing so much pleasure at Paul's arrival, she subdued her looks and went on. "You remember, Cater, the story of Paul Legarde's death?"

"I remember his being assassinated," he replied, "but why do you call it 'the story'?"

"Because Paul Legarde is alive."

He uttered an exclamation of mingled surprise and dismay and pushed back his chair. Lois settled down into a seat opposite and told him the rest.

"Paul Legarde is here. He knows nothing of what has happened to the Haverlands, and I have given him a surprise the reverse of pleasant."

"How and when did he come?" demanded Cater Wadmore, roughly.

"By an early train, I suppose, and it appears to me that he has walked over," said Lois, composedly.

"Then let him walk back again, I'll not have him here."

"Not so fast, Cater, dear. You are so impetuous. Paul Legarde must stay, at least for a while, for three reasons—he is very ill and needs rest, he must be kept from seeking the Haverlands, and I wish him to remain."

"I tell you," said her husband, violently, "that I will not have the man here. Do you think I have forgotten that you were spoons upon him, and although you and I are not quite what we might be I can't stand the thought of—"

"My dear Cater," said Lois, with the air of a calm reasoner, "how wildly you talk. Do you think I am a schoolgirl to be troubled with past love? I propose to keep him here on political grounds."

"I do not see your policy."

"He shall not marry Vida Haverland."

"He may marry whom he pleases, and the pair may go to the deuce. I'll not have him here, and he goes at once, ill or well."

"But I have invited him to stay."

"Then rescind your invitation."

"I won't," she answered, curtly. "What do you take me for? Am I a child or a slave that you bid me do this, and that I invite a friend to stay and dismiss him at a word?"

"If you do not do it I will," he replied.

"Do it," she said, rising disdainfully, "and as I live I will tell him of what you have done in the past, the compact we made, and how our marriage was brought about. If I mistake not you will find him less gentle than Beaumont Haverland. Paul Legarde roused is a man to fear."

Cater Wadmore turned green with fury, but he saw that the coil of his own making was around him, and there was no escape. Biting his lip he sat and received instructions how to comport himself towards his most unwelcome guest.

"You will please to be civil, nay, friendly to him. Let him know that he is welcome, and that he is for the present to make Haganhaugh his home. I have told him that the Haverlands have gone to the Antipodes, and that Vida has given encouragement to a young colonist. We had better settle upon this mythical personage."

"What a liar this woman can be if she means it," muttered Cater Wadmore.

"You are grumbling something to yourself," she went on, "no doubt very complimentary to me, but we will let that pass. The young colonist must have a name. What do you say to call him Cowper Aule?"

"Call him what you like, I shall not talk about him."

"Perhaps that will be the wisest course, and I do not think that Paul Legarde will talk much to you. He confides in few people."

"You are one of the fortunate few," snarled her husband.

"Just so. But our confidence is at an end. He will subside into the position of temporary guest until I settle whether he is to go or stay. I must now return to him. Will you come with me?"

"No. I should be sorry to spoil your fooling."

Lois smiled. She could pass over the temper of her husband now. With Paul present she

had a weapon that kept him in check. Do what she might he dare not do anything but bear. The cowardly instincts of Cater Wadmore were the strings she played upon.

She knew and he knew that if Paul Legarde were told of the dastardly plot arranged against Vida's happiness, and carried out with such signal success, that he would assuredly chastise the chief offender, Cater Wadmore.

Paul had southern blood in his veins, and had a passionate disposition lying latent within him. He might even kill one who had injured him so grievously.

When Lois was gone the wretched schemer, who lay upon a double rug and experienced untold tortures of hatred and jealousy, cursed and groaned. But he could do nothing else, he was helpless in the hands of this woman whom he had chosen as his mate.

"I wonder what next there is in store for me," he muttered, as he lit a cigar outside and strolled down the park. "All round the horizon the clouds are gathering."

Lois found Paul Legarde composed. His face was deadly pale, but he was very quiet, and when he spoke there was no quaver in his voice.

"I have decided to stay with you, Mrs. Wadmore, for awhile," he said, "and I thank you very much for your invitation. But may I ask for the past to be buried?"

"Assuredly," she replied. "We shall be able to rally you in a few days, for we shall have a house full of guests. There are many people you will know, and I will endeavour to be as good a hostess to you as Haganhaugh gave you before."

"It is imperative that I have a few days' quiet," he said. "One of the wounds I received is troubling me" (he laid his hand upon his side where he had certainly a double wound), "and I should like a little medical advice. I am eager to get well—I must get well—for I have a purpose in my mind that must be carried out."

"Now take my advice," said Lois, with the candid air of an honest friend, "and do not fill your mind with romantic ideas. As the past is to be forgotten, rise above it, forget it, and ere long you will find one worthy of you."

He shook his head and slightly smiled. But there was no mirth in his smile; it was cold and hard, and very much unlike what had ever been on his face before.

"You will find breakfast ready for you," Lois went on. "I have ordered it for you, and as I am going into the village I will ask Doctor Danvers to come and see you. We have given you the white room as it faces south."

"You are very good and kind," he said, gratefully—"you always were."

She gave him her hand with that dangerous smile of hers upon her face, and he stooped down and touched her taper fingers with his lips. A thrill of exultation passed through her heart, but it was soon chilled with the thought: "There is a great bar between him and me."

And she was thinking of it in bitterness as she drove the pony carriage towards the village. What would her life have been now if she had not hastily married Cater Wadmore? She might have won Paul Legarde—and she might gain him yet if Cater Wadmore died.

It was the first whisper of the tempter whose office it is to lead men and women to destroy each other, and it came upon her with startling suddenness. And she was not prepared for it. False and base as she was in many respects she had not yet come to look upon such a deep and awful crime otherwise than with abhorrence.

She urged the ponies forward, and forcing her mind into another and more pleasant channel fairly ran away from the dark suggestion.

Doctor Danvers was in, and started off straight away to see the patient. As he was leaving Lois gave him a few instructions he was extremely likely to follow.

"Your patient," she said, "is in great need of rest, and I think he ought to stay for some time at Haganhaugh. I have no wish to dictate to you, but if you think a stay with us will be beneficial, pray advise him to remain."

The doctor, pliable as wax to the new mistress

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of Haganhaugh, lifted his hat and rode away, and Lois drove through the village towards Ballingower. She had suddenly remembered Captain Martingale, and conscious of having made a false move in that direction, felt it was imperative upon her to remedy it without delay.

She rightly calculated that he had already left the appointed spot—of his coming she had not the least doubt—and hoped to overtake him on his way back.

Again she was right! In a quiet part of the road, half a mile from Ballingower, she espied him on ahead walking with his head down, and a general hang-dog air upon him.

"He feels it keenly," she thought. "If I do not take care I shall have some trouble with him."

He heard the sound of wheels behind him, and turning saw her. The interpretation any man would have made under the circumstances he made—she had been kept from the trysting spot by something unforeseen, and was hastening after him to make amends for her apparent neglect.

A moment before he had been full of repentance, and had framed the very words he would speak to his wife on his return, which were to lay bare his sin without concealment in any form. But all changed with the sight of the coquette.

The fickleness and weakness of man's nature were illustrated by him in that hour. The temptress he had cursed a few minutes before he was now ready to fall down before with the breathings of love upon his lips. She saw what was in him and reined up.

"How do you do, Captain Martingale?" she said, with the genial friendliness that a skilful lady knows so well how to assume when she wishes to check a too ardent admirer. "I hope you did not take any notice of my foolish little note, for—"

"But I did," he replied, as he closely scanned her face, "and I have waited an hour for you."

"How shall I apologise?" said Lois, sweetly, "and about such a trivial affair too? But I am such a weak woman and so soon upset by what my mother says. Do you know her? If you do you must remember that she has a very unfortunate temper, and one doesn't care to go to a husband with the defects of one he has become closely allied to, and—"

"Mrs. Wadmore," interposed Captain Martingale, with a dogged look upon his handsome face, "do you really think for a moment that I can accept this explanation? Your appointment to meet me was to settle no family affair—"

"Captain Martingale!"

"Forgive me if I am rude, but this is no time for me to take the longest road to what I have to say. We met for the first time two days ago. At that time I was a happy man, and thought I had in my wife the one woman I loved, or could ever love. But you have taught me differently."

"If I have inspired you with an unworthy passion I am sorry," she said, gathering up the reins, "but I must forbid your speaking of it to me."

"Pardon," he said, staying her hand. "I must have you to listen to me—to the end. What your power with other men is I know not. It is enough that I know what it is to me. It may be but the spell of an hour that is upon me, and I may awake ere long to a life of repentance, but the fact remains—you have inspired me—I love you; I came to-day to fly with you—"

"Really, Captain Martingale, I gave you credit for having arrived at man's estate. This is the folly of the schoolboy."

"It may be, but it has aroused the passion of a man."

"I cannot stay longer," said Lois. "Do not hold the reins, please. I regret the error you have fallen into, but you cannot blame me."

"I understand," he said, with a sudden ferocity, that sent the blood from her cheeks, "but the mistake lies on your part. You thought I was a schoolboy on whom the tricks of your eyes and tongue could be played with impunity."

You are wrong. You will find that you cannot wreck a manhood like a boyhood and get off scot free. The day will come when you will bitterly regret you have fooled Harvey Martingale."

He let go the reins, turned stiffly on his heel, and strode away towards Ballingower.

CHAPTER XVII.

WOO ME, WIN ME.

My soul
Wastes itself away in chains and bends beneath
The weight of oppression. A voice cries out
"Love will bring thee to the tomb," but I wish
To expire at thy feet—rather than abandon thee.

Lois was not satisfied with the interview she had with Captain Martingale. She saw that as she had roused a latent passion in his breast so in turn she had brought forth a latent power of hatred. The man was like some musical instrument in which were strings no hand had ever touched before, and she had struck them fiercely so that his whole nature was jangled and out of tune.

She thought to simply anger him, and she courted his contempt. She did not care what he might think of her so that he troubled her no more. But she had found him of sterner stuff than he at first appeared to be.

"What will he do?" she mused, as the ponies ambled leisurely up the avenue leading to Haganhaugh. "What can he do? He can persist in becoming our guest, and will do so. He will watch me with lynx eyes, and when he sees Paul Legarde—Paul must not be seen. The invalid must keep his room for days at least."

The doctor's horse was standing at the door tethered to an iron ring in the wall, and Lois, as the groom came up to take charge of the chaise, bade him lead it away.

Having thus secured against his leaving without seeing her she sauntered down the terrace and entered the library by the window Paul Legarde had made use of that morning.

From here she could see when the doctor came forth, and here she watched until he came out and in surprise looked for his steady-going steed, that was not wont to break its bridle and career over the fields.

"I fear, doctor, that I have given you an unnecessary shock. I took compassion on your horse and sent it to the stable."

Doctor Danvers was fifty-five, but there yet remained in his heart an admiration for women, and as Lois with her graceful carriage came and poured the melody of her voice into his ears he thought her the most beautiful and fascinating woman he had ever seen.

So good and gracious too to think of his old horse, an animal well known about the country around Haganhaugh for its hardihood. It could have slept on the roof of the church in the depths of winter and been none the worse for it, and it was overpowering kindness to think of its health in summer time.

"I am obliged to you, indeed, madame," he said, "and so is Rajah without a doubt. A doctor's life is a busy one, and he sees very little of the inside of a stable."

"How is your patient?" asked Lois.

"Suffering from a considerable depression and a half-healed incision wound inflicted with a knife or some such similar weapon. Mr. Legarde says it was a sort of dagger that did the mischief, and there is nothing in my experience to lead me think he is mistaken."

Lois listened to the prosy old man with wondrous patience, and smiled upon him sweetly when he got to the end of his talk. He bowed, a little bewildered by that dazzling face, and was going towards the stables when she moved up the terrace and beckoned him to follow.

"Your patient must have quiet, I believe," she said.

"Absolute quiet, or as near as one can get it," he replied.

"In that case, Doctor Danvers, I must ask you not to speak of his being here—at least not

for a few days. He is a very old friend of—of Lady Lawstocke's, and my mother would never forgive me if anything happened to him."

The doctor was a little disappointed at having a restriction put upon his tongue, as he already had laid out a very nice little circle of people to whom he was going to impart the glad tidings—glad to him at least—of his being already wanted at Haganhaugh; but a few days' restraint was not a very heavy tax, and he promised to obey.

"By the way," said Lois, "you know Mr. Wadmore?"

"I have seen him in the days when Colonel

"Oh, you must not speak of Colonel Haverland to us, we all feel his misfortune so keenly. To return to Mr. Wadmore—have you seen him since we came down?"

"I saw him this morning."

"He looked pale and anxious, did he not?"

The doctor had certainly not noticed that he did, but he said:

"Very pale and anxious, my dear madame."

"Mr. Wadmore," said Lois, slightly shuddering, "has not been well for some time past, for weeks I ought to say to be more correct. He has something the matter with his heart, but he cannot bear the slightest allusion to it, and so I must get you to notice him when you meet. Consider him your patient and report to me. As it is a peculiar case I must ask you to go out of your usual course with regard to a fee."

A crisp five-pound note was handed to him, and he took it. He would have been the most unmedical of medical men if he had refused it. He expressed his thanks a little profusely, and mingled his words with a troublesome, nervous cough.

"People with heart disease," said Lois, turning away, "die suddenly, I believe."

"Not always, my dear madame. I have known cases of—"

"But as a rule they do. I must not be deceived. Give me the whole truth and then I shall have no doubt to dwell upon."

"Too often victims to the fell disease die without warning, madame, but they suffer very little pain—very little indeed," said the doctor.

"Ah!" was all Lois said for the moment, and they paced the length of the terrace in silence.

"Are you engaged to-night?" she said, at last, "or can you dine with us?"

Dine at Haganhaugh? Of course he could. He had very little to do just then he assured Mrs. Wadmore. The weather was conducive to good health, and a doctor could almost take a holiday.

"Very well," she replied, "dine with us. Watch Mr. Wadmore, not too closely, and I will call upon you as I pass your house to-morrow."

This interview had not been premeditated until Lois saw the doctor's horse at the door, and then again the tempter came, wrapping his dark idea in the miserable sophistry we all make use of when we wish to sin, and with it Lois tried to persuade herself that she was really anxious about her husband.

"He has not looked well for days," she said, as she ascended the staircase, "and I have been told that pink cheeks with men are a sign of heart disease. Cater has very pink cheeks."

She saw very little of Paul Legarde that day, merely accompanying the housekeeper to the sitting-room set apart for him. She took him some books, and again impressed upon him that he was to make a home of Haganhaugh.

"Until you are quite well," she said, with a sad smile, "and then you can spread your wings, fly away, and forget us."

"I should be an ungrateful dog if I did so," he said.

The doctor was the only guest that night, and Lois explained his coming to her husband beforehand by boldly declaring that Paul Legarde was in great danger and required the almost constant attendance of a medical man.

"I hope Danvers is a muff," said Cater Wadmore, grimly.

"You are a foolish fellow," replied Lois, with a playful smile. "Paul Legarde will never give you cause for jealousy."

"Humph!" he muttered, and they went down to dinner, she leaning affectionately upon his

arm, but there was not even a servant on the way to bear witness of her demonstration.

The doctor had come early, as became a man who was patronised. He was charmed, and was tempted to say so, although he had the wisdom to hold his tongue, to see the affectionate solicitude of Lois for Cater Wadmore.

As for the victim of this sudden affection he could only charge it to an attempt to blind his eyes, and he did not feel at all complimented by his being mistaken for a fool. Some men might be taken in by it, but not he; and he decided to keep a strict watch upon Lois and Paul Legarde.

The doctor's report on the following morning was as follows:

"There are symptoms of disturbing elements in the system of Mr. Wadmore, and flushings of the face that might be associated with heart disease, but I do not think there is any cause for great anxiety."

"There is no immediate danger?" Lois said.

"None, my dear madame, but I must be frank and tell you that heart disease does not always give premonitory symptoms of the final attack. Men have lived to a great age with weak hearts."

On her return from the doctor's she found Lady Lawstocke had arrived, bringing with her sufficient luggage to show that she meant to stay. Already she had wormed out of the housekeeper all the secrets of the house, and was in a perturbed state of mind about Paul Legarde.

"That man turning up will do you no good, Lois," she said. "I have seen a deal of life, and I have some faith in Fate. His coming is a warning finger to me."

"You are getting old," replied Lois, calmly, "and have the natural fears of age. As for the finger of Fate I am not afraid of it. Cater knows you have arrived, I suppose."

"He has seen me, and given me what I call a scant welcome. He gave me a lifeless hand to shake, and asked me if I had come to help to make his life miserable. Something is wrong with him."

"He does not love me, and yet he is stupidly jealous of every man who looks at me."

"How often do you see Paul Legarde?"

"Only once as yet since he settled in his room, and then with the housekeeper."

"Don't overdo your prudence," said Lady Lawstocke, "or you will make me suspicious."

"Of your suspicions I think little," replied her daughter, with more truth than filial affection.

Being accustomed to these displays of heartlessness Lady Lawstocke made no scene about it, but in a calm, worldly spirit discussed other matters. The list of invited guests was brought out and formed an engaging theme for discussion.

"Sir James Caistor, and guests, Captain and Mrs. Martingale," said Lady Lawstocke. "What Martingale is that?"

"Of the Bengal Cavalry," replied Lois. "He is home on leave."

"I know this man—or at least his family," said Lady Lawstocke. "Did you ever hear the story of his father?"

"No. I know nothing of them."

"He was an old flame of mine, Lois, before I married, but it was a flickering light that burnt between us. He married Caroline Torridale, of the Great Ghaut in Cumberland, and very happy they were together until he fell in love with another woman."

"Married?"

"Of course. Married men generally covet their neighbours' chattels. He was encouraged, I believe, but only for a while, and the girl—let me see—who was she?"

"Never mind," said Lois, impatiently, "tell me what happened."

"She ran away with Peverly, of the Blues. The husband ought to have followed, but for reasons he best understood he did not. The elder Martingale—this man was a babe in arms then—followed the pair and brought them to bay somewhere about Nice."

"And what did he do?"

"Shot his rival in a duel and gave Caroline

the choice of a nunnery or death. She chose a nunnery, but was afterwards set free. Family influence did it. As for him, he went to some place in a lone land connected with Russia and died there. He was, I think, very hard upon Caroline. She lost husband, lover, position, society, everything, and, I believe, died in a madhouse."

"A cheerful story, truly," said Lois, with a quivering lip. "Have you brought any more down with you? They will help to make us happy in Haganhaugh."

"It is the first story I ever knew to affect you," her mother replied, as she surveyed her through a pair of double eye-glasses. "Surely, Lois, you are not getting soft?"

"No. I am hardening. I shall be as hard as you ere I am five years older."

"Lois," said the old woman, passionately, "why do you taunt me with being hard? It is only to the world I am so. To you I am wax."

"Then bend to my wishes and tell me no more Martingale stories," said Lois; "to-morrow the gaieties begin. Help me to get in sunshine to warm the nest we have taken from another."

Lady Lawstocke shrugged her shoulders and went on with the list, dotting off those who had accepted and those who regretted previous engagements. There was nothing approaching a cool refusal throughout.

"You have started well, Lois," she said, "and the rest depends upon yourself. If you are wise you will send Paul Legarde away."

"I will think of it," Lois said.

And she thought of it through the day as a thing she could not do. Such love as she had in her heart she had given to him long ago, before he had been engaged to Vida, and now that he was further off than ever it returned like a torrent checked awhile by a barrier.

She sent Cater Wadmore up to make the usual inquiries, and bade him show Paul the most pleasant side of his character, and she was obeyed. The new owner of Haganhaugh, when it suited his private ends, could dissemble as well as most men.

He talked soberly to Paul and spoke as if the life of the past had grown distasteful to him and he found his union with Lois a source of contentment.

"I have been no better than others," he said, "but I have come to wonder how it is that young men can be the fools they are."

"I am glad you are happy," Paul said, "it pleases me to think you have found in your wife a woman to value. They are scarce in these days of empty talk and cold cynicism."

Cater Wadmore left him with a smile, and ground his teeth as he journeyed downstairs. It was a relief he needed, having been obliged to shut down the safety-valve when with Paul and reserve the blowing off of steam to a more fitting occasion.

Paul liked to be alone, and he spent a quiet evening. The weather was sultry, and he found both open door and window agreeable. By the latter, facing south, he saw the sun go down and a crescent moon rise into the sky. Gradually the stillness of night settled on the landscape, and the noise of moving men and women subsided in the house.

The time passed, and he counted the hours as the old church clock chimed them. The deep, soft tone of the bell was soothing to his perturbed spirit, and, uneasily, he subsided into a dream of the past.

There was the rustle of a dress without, but he heard it not, nor did he see a pale, beautiful face that paused by the door and looked in. He was far, far away in his thoughts.

It was Lois who had thus come near to him. She had been sitting up in her room writing and stolen out into the corridor for a little cool air. The sight of his open door was unexpected and she shrank back. A danger lurked in her now going near it.

But when she saw the outline of his handsome face, lit up by the faint rays the moon cast down, she was irresistibly drawn towards him, and with a soft, faltering step entered the room.

(To be Continued.)

OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS.

STRANGE CAREER OF AN ADVENTURESE.

There died at Naples, September 15th, 1851, La Comtesse Nelson D'Arcy, Duchessella Palatta. The adventures of this person, says the "Gentleman's Magazine," would fill no small page in romantic story. She was the only daughter of Mr. John Peele, a small farmer at Corringham, near Gainsborough, who eked out a declining livelihood by dealing in horses, etc. She became a dressmaker in Gainsborough, resided subsequently in Hull, and, it is said, as housemaid in a good family in London, where her attractions obtained for her the attention of a person of rank, to whom she afterwards averred she was married, and she from that time occupied a position where her fortunes led her into contact with some of the higher classes. Afterwards she astonished former companions by appearing with her carriage and liverly servants—at the expense of Mr. Fauntleroy, then a flourishing banker in London, but subsequently executed for forgery. But she generally maintained a fair appearance in society, both in London and in Paris. She shortly reappeared in her native country as Duchess of Palatta. At this time the fortunes of her family had reduced them to be the occupants of a small cottage at Morton, and, age rendering her father incapable of active exertion, he filled the humble office of rural postman. One good thing may certainly be recorded in her praise—she enabled her parents to pass the remainder of their days in comfort. About 1845 she again visited her native place, a widow, the Duke of Palatta having died. Her mother she left at Morton, paid the last duties to her father (somewhat ostentatiously), and volunteered her assistance to promote the advancement of her female relatives. Again, however, "a change came o'er the spirit of her dream," and the public journals announced her marriage to the son of an Irish clergyman of good family. In this character, accompanied by her niece as femme de chambre, she once more visited Gainsborough and the scenes of her youth. After making her mother an allowance to be paid monthly (to prevent some avaricious persons from defrauding her of it) she again departed for Italy in good health, but death closed the last scene of the strange, eventful history.

OLD LONDON THEATRES.—Great interest, says P. Cunningham, was used at the Restoration for the erection of new theatres in London, but Charles the Second, acting it is thought on the advice of Clarendon, who wished to stem the flood of idle gaiety and dissipation, would not allow of more than two—the King's Theatre, under the control of Thomas Killigrew, and the Duke's Theatre (so called in compliment to his brother, the Duke of York), under the direction of Sir William Davenant. Killigrew was one of the grooms of the bedchamber to the king, a well-known wit at court and a dramatist himself; and Davenant, who filled the office of poet Laureate in the household of the king, as he had before done with Charles the First, had been a successful writer for the stage while Ben Jonson and Massinger were still alive. The King's Theatre, or "The Theatre" as it was commonly called, stood in Drury Lane, on the site of the present building, and was the first theatre erected on the site. It was small, with few pretensions to architectural beauty, and was first opened on the 8th April, 1663. The stage was lighted with wax candles on brass censers or cressets. The pit lay open to the weather for the sake of light, but was subsequently covered in with a glazed cupola, which, however, only imperfectly protected the audience, so that in stormy weather the house was thrown into disorder and the people in the pit were fain to rise. The Duke's Theatre, commonly called "The Opera," from the nature of its performances, stood at the back of what is now the Royal College of Surgeons, in Portugal Row, on the south side of Lincoln's Inn fields. It was origi-

nally a tennis court, and like its rival was run up hurriedly to meet the wants of the age. The interior arrangements and accommodation were much the same as at Killigrew's house. . . . The performances commenced at three in the afternoon. It was usual, therefore, to dine beforehand and when the play was over to adjourn to the Mulberry Garden or Vauxhall, or some other place of public entertainment. The prices of admission were, boxes four shillings, pit two and sixpence, middle gallery eighteen pence, upper gallery one shilling. The ladies in the pit wore vizards or masks. The middle gallery was long the favourite resort of Mr. and Mrs. Peppy. The upper gallery, as at present, was attended by the poorest and noisiest. Servants in livery were admitted as soon as the fifth act commenced. . . . The dresses at both houses were magnificent and costly, but little or no attention was paid to costume. The king, the queen, the duke, and several of the richer nobility gave their coronation suits to the actors, and on extraordinary occasions a play was equipped at the expense of the king. Old court dresses were contributed by the gentry, and birthday suits continued to be presented as late as the reign of George the Second.

Spoons.—St. Paul's Day (January 25) being the first festival of an apostle in the year, it is an opportunity for alluding to the old English custom with sponsors or visitors at christenings of presenting spoons called apostle spoons, because the figures of the twelve apostles were chased or carved on the tops of the handles. Brand cites several authors to testify of the practice. Persons who could afford it gave the set of twelve, others a smaller number, and a poor person offered the gift of one, with the figure of the saint after whom the child was named, or to whom the child was dedicated, or who was the patron saint of the good-natured donor. Ben Jonson, in his play "Bartholomew Fair," has a character saying, "And all this for the hope of a couple of apostle spoons and a cup to eat caudle in." It seems that about 1666 the usage was on the decline.

THEATRICALS.—Nebraska audiences are unconventional in their conduct. At Lincoln, while John T. Raymond was presenting the trial scene in "Colonel Sellers," two dogs began to fight in the centre aisle. All attention was instantly diverted from the stage to the fight. "I move we suspend proceedings in this court," said Raymond, "and I'll bet a dollar on the white dog." "I'll take you," cried a man in the audience. The white dog won, the dollar was passed across the footlights to the star, and the acting of the play was resumed.

VERA'S VENTURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"So Fair Her Face," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RESCUED.

Alas for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun.
Oh, it was pitiful,
Near a whole city full
Home she had none.

"Now where is that Dan, I wonder?"

And Mrs. O'Callagan rubbed her eyes, for she had nearly fallen asleep over her work, and stretched herself and looked at the clock.

"It's just upon one, I declare. It's too bad of him."

It was too bad if the absent Dan was letting anything unlawful keep him out till such an unseemly hour, for his home was as bright as a working man's home could be, and the wife who was waiting for him was as trim a little woman as ever a husband owned.

"He said to-day that they were beginning to plan for the pantomime already," she said. "If they are, my troubles will begin. It will be all

hours before he comes home from now till Christmas. He always seems to be wanted after the performance."

The absent Mr. O'Callagan was a stage carpenter, and a very clever man in his trade, or, as he termed it, his "profession"—anything about a theatre is a profession—and he held a good appointment at the fashionable theatre known as the "Wellington," though popularly called "Bryant's" from the name of its popular actor manager.

No expense was spared at Bryant's, and the stage carpenter and his confrères had need be the best of their class. Nothing was permitted but what was absolute perfection in every detail. There were to be no lives risked through negligent work, and everything turned out of the carpenter's shop was well finished and safe.

Dan's wife knew that wherever he was he was not drunk. Mr. Bryant had an eye and an ear like a hawk's for anything like drink, and no offender was ever pardoned twice.

Mary O'Callagan had been on the stage there—that is, she had for a little while been one of the girls who walk on and form pretty groups, but she had no talent for anything better, as she knew. She could not dance, and she would have died of fright if she had ever been bidden to speak a word on the stage, so when the master carpenter offered her his hand and heart, and a good home into the bargain, she gave up her ambitious dreams of being a young lady and said "Yes" like a sensible girl as she was.

She had never repented, and her old companions envied her in their hearts, though they affected to look down upon her as a workman's wife. She had a tidy and pleasant home, although it was up two flights of stairs in a back street, and Dan had money in the bank as well. She herself earned no inconsiderable sum by needlework in the theatre. She could not go out to it, but she was skilful, and the wardrobe mistress was glad to entrust her with it at home.

She had a pile of it in her room now—white dresses, being trimmed with the fantastic bordering supposed to be Greek, and she gave a little sigh of weariness as she rubbed her hands and looked at her roughened finger. A sewing-machine stood in a corner of the room, but she had been doing parts which the machine would not do, and her hands were tired.

"Dan's supper will be quite spoiled to-night," she said, peeping into a saucepan, where something good, to judge from the smell of it, was simmering for his nightly meal. "I'll go down to the door and see if he's loitering in the street."

Once or twice it had so happened that Dan had loitered, to the spoiling of his supper. He was of a chatty, gregarious disposition, and loved a gossip like any woman. All the rest of the house seemed to be in bed and asleep when she opened her door and gazed down the dark staircase.

The house was large and occupied by several sets of people, mostly theatrical, for its situation was central and, for the neighbourhood, the rents were low.

Mrs. O'Callagan paused for a moment, listening before she went down, in case any of the other inmates might be about, and then took up her candle.

"I'll leave it on the first floor landing," she said. "It's blowing and raining so outside it will go out. Mercy on us! what's that?"

It was a curious noise, as if someone had pushed open the door and then fallen down inside of it, not with a bang, but with a heavy, swishing sound, as if from inability to stand any longer.

"It's Dan," she said to herself, in terror. "Dan, and he's ill or drunk perhaps."

The last idea was far more awful than the former. Drunkenness, in her eyes, was an unpardonable sin, and she would have looked upon Dan as lost for ever if he had once come home in such a state of helpless intoxication as that inert fall portended. Hardly knowing what she did, she rushed downstairs to find the street door wide open and a woman lying there like one dead.

She fetched her lamp and placed it where it would not blow out, and then looked at the woman. She was not drunk—that she decided at a glance. There was no smell or look of drink about her, but she was afraid she was dead—her hands were icy cold and her face white. She was young and pretty, and Mrs. O'Callagan knew enough about feminine attire to be able to tell that she was a lady. Her clothes, though wet and mudstained, were well made and good, and she had the look of a person in the higher walks of life.

"What shall I do with her?" she said to herself, vainly trying to lift the insensible form.

Just then a policeman appeared at the open door, and she hailed his appearance with delight.

"Oh, do help me to get her up," she said.

"Up where, Mrs. O'Callagan?" he asked.

He knew her and her husband very well.

"Up to my room. She seems to be dying of cold or something. She must be warmed and attended to this minute."

"You'd better let me get help and take her away to the station," the man said, civilly enough. "There's such a lot of shamming goes on now that she may be only drunk or plotting some mischief. You'd better not take her in."

"I shall take her in until she is warmed," said the impulsive little woman. "She isn't drunk. You'd smell it if she was. You may have her after we have brought her round if you like. Do carry her upstairs for me, there's a good soul. I'll give you something for it."

"Lor' bless you, ma'am, I don't want nothing," the man said. "I was only thinking it would be better for me to take her to the station. I'll take her up for you, or welcome, and I'll hang about the door a bit in case you want me afterwards. She may be a bad one, you know."

"I don't believe she is. I'll risk that, any way. You go first; straight up—the second floor front."

The man picked up the slight form as if it were a feather and went up to Mrs. O'Callagan's tidy room.

"Put her down here, please, in this chair," she said, and the poor wail from the streets was deposited in a large, old-fashioned easy chair, with a cushion under her head.

The policeman would fain have stayed a minute to see what came next, but he must not be absent from his beat, so he only stopped long enough to drink the beer which was set before him and went his way. Then the little mistress of the house turned to her insensible guest.

"Oh, dear, suppose she's dead!" she said to herself. "What shall I do?"

She took off the soddened and shapeless hat and looked admiringly at the mass of pretty, wavy hair that fell down over her hands as she did so.

"No false hair," she muttered, "and her own well brushed and kept. She's a lady."

She chafed the cold hands, and presently the white eyelids lifted and the eyes gazed round the room with a bewildered stare. Quick as thought she put something to the pale lips. It was only some of the gravy out of Dan's supper, but it was the very thing that was wanting. Hunger had as much to do with the desperate condition of the woman as anything else. Spoonful after spoonful was swallowed, and then a flood of hysterical tears showed that consciousness was returning.

"Cry away; it will do you good," Mrs. O'Callagan said—she had great faith in tears being a relief—"you are quite safe here. You can tell me who you are and where to send to your friends when you are better."

"My goodness gracious, Bessie! what is the matter?"

It was something of a surprise to Mr. O'Callagan to come home and find his wife bending over a woman in hysterics and his usually neat home all upside down as it were.

"Who is it, my girl?"

"I don't know, Dan, but she'd have died if I hadn't brought her up. You shall have your supper in a minute, dear."

"I've had it. That's what made me so late. Mr. Bryant wanted to talk to me about the pantomime, and he stood cold meat and beer. He said our wives would be tired of waiting for us."

"Mr. Bryant's a good fellow," Bessie said. "Only think, Dan, this poor thing fell down in our passage, and the policeman, the big one you know, brought her upstairs for me."

"You're an impulsive little woman, Bessie," Dan said, in a low tone, but not angrily. "She may not be a fit person for you to have anything to do with."

"Dan, she's a woman, and in trouble. You'd have taken a stray dog in, dear, and fed it. She's of more value than a dog."

"That's true, Bessie, and I'm a brute. We'll keep her for a bit, any way, and give her something to eat. She looks starved, poor thing."

He went into the other room while his wife ministered to the stranger, who was able to eat by this time.

"I am not what you think me," she said, faintly.

"Lor' bless you, we don't think anything," Bessie said. "I am glad to be able to help you."

"But I am better now. I am sorry to have troubled you. Please don't send your husband away for me. I will go now."

"Go," said Bessie, "out into this rain? Not while Dan and me can give you a shelter. You are welcome to it, you poor thing, and you can give it to someone else when you are able. There then, don't cry. Have some supper now, and then I'll make you up a bed down here by the fire."

She brought one of her own dresses, just about the proper size for her guest, and remarked, as she helped her to remove her wet things, on the fineness and beauty of her underclothing.

"Are you wet through?" she asked.

"Not quite, I think," was the quiet answer.

"I have been out in the rain a long while, but my jacket is long and nearly waterproof. I have sheltered where I could."

She did not seem able to talk much, and her hostess got her undressed and into the bed she had prepared for her, resolving to put off all questioning till the morning. She had to undress her and help her to lie down, for reaction was setting in, and the warmth and kindness, coming after what had seemed to the poor girl like death itself, were too much for her, and, almost before her head was on the pillow of her temporary couch, she was fast asleep.

"On, Dan, do you think she is dead, after all?" Mrs. O'Callaghan called softly to her husband, when she had drawn the bedclothes over the prostrate figure.

"Not a bit of it, my girl," Dan said, looking closely into the still face, "she's worn out, that's all. You needn't trouble about her any more to-night. She's a pretty creature, Bessie. I am glad that you didn't let them take her away to the station."

"She'd have died on the road, Dan," Bessie replied.

And she was right—the flickering flame had only been saved from going out entirely by her timely interference.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A NEW WORLD.

Whatever crazy sorrow saith
No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly longed for death.

THE poet is right, life is sweet to us all, and Nellie felt it so, poor, tired child, when she opened her eyes once more after a long, dreamless sleep. She had prayed to die the night before when she had leaned against the door and felt it give way with her. She thought it was death, when she sank, as it seemed to her, down into unfathomable depths of darkness and knew nothing more.

She but dimly remembered the help that had come to her and the food that had been put to her lips, she only knew that she was saved, and

she slept as only those can sleep who are worn out as she was. For a minute she did not know where she was and she put out her hand for her bell to call Wilson. Her searching fingers found no bell rope and encountered the hard back of a chair instead.

"Where am I?" she asked herself, her bewildered faculties not able yet to realise anything. Then it all came back to her, her flight, her hurried journey, and its ending, and then the awful streets. She was not in the streets now, she was warm and dry, and, oh, so hungry. Who had rescued her? Whose room was this, clean and tidy, though evidently parlour and kitchen and all? She lay and looked about her and marked the comfortable appearance of everything and the work lying in an orderly heap on a chair.

Her clothes were on a horse by the fire cleaned and dried and her hat was hanging behind the door, its shape somewhat restored and the mud splashes cleaned from it. A door was open opposite the temporary couch on which she lay, and she could hear someone moving about in the inner room. Presently a bright-looking little woman with a fresh, good-tempered face came bustling in.

"Ah, you are awake at last," she said. "Are you better?"

"Better, yes, thank you," was the puzzled reply. Is it you who saved me? God bless you for it, I—

"There, there, don't talk yet," Bessie O'Callaghan said, gently. "You can tell me all about it when you have had some breakfast. Don't try to stir till I have given you something to eat. Poor thing, I am sure you must want rest."

"I don't know how to thank you," poor Nellie said, tears of gratitude standing in her eyes. "I do not even know where I am, nor who it is I have to thank."

"You'll know all about it presently," Bessie said, bringing a little table to the side of Nellie's couch. "Here's some coffee and a bit of bacon and there's an egg if you would like one. Do make a good breakfast."

She was so sincere in her wish that her guest should be comfortable, and so kind in her bright, cheery manner, that Nellie felt as if her troubles were very far removed, and she ate and drank and her life and spirits came back and the world seemed brighter and better as the food strengthened her.

"Sleep again if you can," Bessie said, when her meal was over. "You aren't a bit in the way there, I can work just as well, as if you weren't there, and I shall have the house to myself all day. Dan has to stay out, and he'll get his dinner somewhere else."

Nellie wondered vaguely who "Dan" might be, and Mrs. O'Callaghan saw the inquiry in her face.

"Dan's my husband," she said. "He was as glad as I was that we were able to help you last night."

"Did he bring me up here?"

"Bless you, no, he wasn't at home. It was the big policeman that carried you up; he wanted to take you to the station, but you looked that bad I was afraid you'd die on the road and I wouldn't let him."

"God bless you for that. I don't think there was much life left in me then."

"I don't think there was. Now then if you won't lie any longer I have put some water in the other room and your clothes are all dry, and when you are dressed you can tell me just what you wanted to do, and we will help you if we can, Dan and me."

Nellie went into the other room to dress with a heart too full to speak. She had heard of the goodness of the poor to each other before now, but she had hardly comprehended what it meant. Who were these people that seemed to be taking her on trust when everyone else had doubted her word and insulted her? She dressed herself as quickly as she could and went into the room where she had slept, where she found Bessie busy at work. She had cleared away Nellie's temporary bed and the place looked a perfection of neatness. She was one of those

women to whom order seems to come as naturally as breathing.

"How can I ever repay you?" Nellie said as she took up her hat and jacket.

"It's payment enough to see you looking so much better; but where are you going?"

"I hardly know, I have to find a place for myself and something to do."

"You just sit down," Mrs. O'Callaghan said; "unless you have friends waiting for you somewhere, you are not going away in that wild fashion. Work is not picked up in the streets, and you are far too young and too pretty to go about asking the first people you meet to take you in and employ you. You don't know London ways or London people."

"No, indeed, I don't," and the thought of her utter friendlessness brought the tears in Nellie's eyes.

Her hostess soothed her and bade her be of good cheer.

"Tell me how you came to be in this plight," she said, and Nellie, suppressing only her name and where she came from, told her the story of her loss of home and friends.

"You see I am nobody," she said, "I do not even know my own name, and if I cannot work I must starve. But perhaps you think I am romancing, the story sounds so unlikely."

"No, I don't; I believe you are telling the honest truth. Anyway don't go yet, take a few more hours' rest—you are very welcome. Dan said I was to keep you if I could."

Nellie was weak and tired yet and the prospect of a little more rest was very grateful to her; besides, this practical little woman might perhaps suggest some way in which to get work. She eyed the sewing that Bessie presently produced and asked if she might help her with it.

"Are you good at your needle?" she asked.

"I don't know," Nellie replied. "I have never worked except for my own amusement. I think I could do that."

Mrs. O'Callaghan gave her a strip of the trimming to work upon, and Nellie's fingers accustomed themselves to the pretty, light work in a very little while.

"I could do this sort of thing," she said. "How much could I earn at it?"

"Ninapence or tenpence a day if you worked very hard," Bessie replied, "but less than that stands between many a woman and the workhouse here in London. You look and speak as if you were fit for something better than wardrobe work."

"Perhaps I am. I don't know. But who would employ me without a character or recommendation? People are so fastidious about their children's governesses."

"Ay, so they are. It takes time to make way in the world. If you like to give me a hand till this job is done maybe something else will turn up."

"Oh, I wish I might," Nellie said, gladly. The prospect of anything that would keep her out of those cruel streets and put even bread in her mouth was a relief. "But where could I live? I could not stay here with you. I am trespassing on your kindness already."

"You could be with me in the daytime when Dan is out," Bessie said, "and he'd be glad to have me helped a bit. As for a lodging you must live somewhere, and there's a little room in the attic, not half a bad place, only they will have their rent to the minute."

"And I have no money. Whatever shall I do?"

"You're money's worth, my dear," and Bessie touched the rings which glittered still on Nellie's fingers. "Did you never think of those all that time you were wandering about last night?"

"No."

"Nor your watch, nor that brooch? It's gold, I suppose."

"Yes, it is gold, but I never thought of it, and I did not see a shop where I could have sold it. I had been so insulted you see, and I was too frightened to think of anything."

"Oh, you need not sell anything. You can raise money on them, and get them again if ever you grow rich."

"At a pawnbroker's?"

"Yes. You never were in one, I suppose?"

"Mr? Oh, no."

Nellie shivered as she spoke. Brought up as she had been the very idea of anything of hers going to a pawnbroker's seemed the very depth of degradation.

Bessie laughed.

"Ah, my dear, you will soon get used to that sort of thing if you have your living to earn in London," she said. "Many a time the pawnshop has been a real blessing to me. There have been times in my life and Dan's too when we should have wanted a meal if we hadn't been able to raise a trifle on whatever came handy. We've no need to do it now, but there's a way for you to pay for a lodging and get a few things if you don't mind parting with your rings."

"Oh, I don't mind," Nellie said, pulling them off hastily. "But where am I to go, and what am I to do? I don't know how."

"Bless you, I'll do it for you," Mrs. O'Callagan replied, and away she went, and returned in what seemed an incredibly short space of time to Nellie with two tiny bits of pasteboard and two pounds ten.

"Keep them safe, my dear," she said. "They are good for a year. They wouldn't give me what I wanted—they never will; but that will tide you over for a bit."

For a bit! It seemed unlimited wealth to Nellie after her wretched experience of starvation and misery. She had thought over her position while Bessie was away, and she came to the conclusion that she had better accept the humble offer of her hostess, and stay near her at least till she had a little accustomed herself to the ways of the struggling part of the London world. If she went back to the lodging with the railway porter's mother—and she doubted very much whether she could find it again—she reflected that in all probability, if she were being sought for, they had traced her there, as was really the case, and the more she thought of Milverstone and Vera Rivers the more determined she was to be entirely lost to everybody who had known her in the old days.

It had been a bitter parting, but it was over. She was still quivering in every nerve with the pain of the sudden wrench, and she would not have the pain revived by any renewal of the old ties. If she could keep to herself as the "Miss Smith" in this obscure place she would.

The landlady asked her five shillings a week for the room, which just held a bed and a chair, which had to serve for dressing-table and washstand as well, and a curious feeling of independence took hold of Nellie as she paid the first week in advance and shut herself into her new domicile. She begged Mrs. O'Callagan to buy her a few articles of clothing from the nearest readymade shop, and an odd feeling took possession of her when her arrangements were completed that she was not Nellie Rivers at all but someone else. Her old life seemed to have faded away in a strange, unreal fashion, and this curious new existence to have taken its place. She must have been in a dream, she thought, and would wake presently at Milverstone with all her friends about her.

Alas, it was no dream, poor child, but stern reality, and she would soon know how hard the world is for a woman to live in who has no friends nor means save those that she can make with her own fingers.

When Dan came home that night, somewhat late again, for the business of planning and preparing for the Christmas show at the "Wellington" had begun in good earnest now, he found a pretty, ladylike girl sitting with his wife, and scarcely recognised the pale, half-dead wanderer of the night before.

"I have found the help I wanted, Dan," Bessie said. "Miss Smith works capitally, and she has taken the attic room that I was always so afraid they would let to some noisy man."

Dan said a few words to "Miss Smith," and had a long chat with his wife about her when she had retired, which she did almost directly.

"I don't want to hinder you doing a good-natured thing, my girl," he said, "but take care;

you don't know her, and you may get yourself into a scrape if you don't mind."

"I'll take her on trust, Dan," she replied. "If her story's true—and I think it is, poor thing—she's more to be pitied than anyone I know."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A STARTLING LIKENESS.

Of expectation fails, and most oft there
Where most it promises.

Mrs. O'CALLAGHAN had plenty of work, and Nellie working with her and sharing her meals when Dan was out, and keeping very much indoors altogether, seemed to have drifted away from her old life entirely.

She felt strangely apathetic though, and as if she should slowly drift away out of the world altogether. What did it matter? she thought. There was no one now to care whether she lived or died—she had no place, no name—an obscure grave in some out-of-the-way corner of the nearest cemetery would be her portion when she was gone, and the sooner the time came the better.

If either Dan or his kindly little wife had seen much of the papers they might have guessed that the girl they had rescued from the streets was being looked for by friends interested in her, but they did not.

Dan spelt through the "Era" sometimes, and Bessie's weekly literature was limited to a chance perusal of "Lloyd's" occasionally. More than this, though the odd story of the changes at Milverstone had been the subject of more than one newspaper paragraph, there had been some very exciting events in the shape of murders of peculiar horror and ferocity, and the public mind and the newspapers were alike full of them.

Anything of that sort always crowds respectable intelligence out of the field, and Nellie's flight and the story of Vera's triumph were soon alike forgotten.

So she remained unnoticed and unsought for at the old house in the back street, managing to eke out what she earned by parting with her watch and chain and the brooch that she had worn when she left home, and so far had been at any rate fed and clothed.

She seemed to have no thought for what would come after. What did it signify? What did anything signify?

Bessie saw the listlessness, and when she knew Nellie had parted with her last remaining trinket and had no other means of adding to her scanty earnings she resolved to talk to her about it.

"Look here, my dear," she said, "what are you going to do next?"

"To do?" Nellie said, lifting her heavy eyes to Bessie's face. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say, child. You work very well and I pay you the full share for it, but it won't keep you—it does not much more than pay your rent."

"No, I suppose not."

"And you haven't anything else, I know. Is there nothing else you can do?"

"I can die, and I think it would be the best thing that could happen," Nellie said, bitterly, but Bessie would not listen to any such a proceeding as that.

"Nonsense," she said, quite sharply for her, "you don't want to die yet. You have been keeping too close here, and the change has not been the best thing for you, only there hasn't seemed anything else to do. You want something to take you out a bit."

"No—no, I don't want to go out, I don't want to be seen."

"Perhaps not, but you must be seen some time, you can't shut yourself up for ever. You've been here a month now and you have hardly ever been out of doors except at night. I've got an idea for you, but I shan't talk to you about it till Dan comes home, he's to be home early to-night, and now we'll go for a walk, you and me. I've got to go quite to the East End, and it will brisk you up a bit."

In vain Nellie protested she did not want to go out, she would rather stay at home, etc. Bessie would take no denial, and they set off, Nellie wondering at herself more than ever as she walked along by the side of her good little friend.

"We shan't meet anyone likely to know you," she said, reassuringly. "If your friends are looking for you it won't be in my society, and we can jump into a 'bus if you fancy you see any of them. That's the best of London, you can get out of people's way if you want to. My father was always having to dodge somebody when I was a little girl."

And Bessie laughed merrily as she recalled the life of shifts and struggles that had been her portion as a child, and of the many flittings her harassed mother had had to make with her little ones to save the scanty furniture they possessed from the hands of the bailiffs.

"Thank goodness Dan isn't one of that sort," she said, cheerily, "he doesn't owe a farthing, Dan doesn't, and he won't let me. I declare you are looking all the better for your bit of air already. It's no good to sit moping at home too much, and brooding over troubles never mends 'em."

Bessie had never had experience of any heart sorrow, but she was right for all that. Nellie was better for the air and the walk, and none the worse for her cheerful companionship, plebeian though it was.

The days of Milverstone and all its luxuries seemed to have gone away into the far past, and become a romance to be thought of as something she had read in a book and not a reality.

Their mission was accomplished and they were returning, taking a short cut into an omnibus route, for they were both somewhat tired, when they suddenly came upon a wedding party emerging from a church, quiet enough, but with the unmistakable something about them that tells of wealth and position, and Nellie's heart stood still almost as she recognised her recreant lover and the woman who had robbed her of all that makes life happy.

Neville Delamere and Vera Rivers—her cousin as she had thought her—her rival as she knew only too well.

But for Bessie's supporting arm she would have fallen, for the whole street seemed to swim before her eyes and the houses to rock as if there was an earthquake.

"You know them?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Come along then," said the impulsive little woman, pulling her away. "If they are people that have served you badly, and she looks a fiend for all her finery, don't you let them see that the sight of them worries you. There, that's better, the colour is coming back into your face. Now don't you think of them; face it out, my dear, and you'll have happy times yet."

And Nellie struggled with herself and fought for composure till she was able to speak with calmness.

"I can't forget things," she said. "I am very foolish. I had such a happy home, and—"

"And you'll have a happy one again some time," Bessie said, cheerily. "I've got something in my mind for you that I think will suit. Dan's to bring me word about it to-night. Any way, it will be bread and cheese for awhile till you can turn to something better."

Nellie heard, but her thoughts were with the pair she had seen coming out of the church; she rightly divined that they were marrying in that odd fashion because they did not want Springfield to be cognisant of their proceedings. They might well be ashamed of their indecent haste—not five weeks since the bridegroom had been her affianced husband and she had given him all her loving, trusting heart.

She could remember now many a thing that should have shown her how false and unworthy he was. She was blind to his attachment to the girl she had brought into her house in charity, and deaf to all the hints that were given her, and they were not a few, that Vera was not worthy of her kindness.



[GOOD SAMARITANS.]

The sight of them in their prosperity and pride unnerved her more than she would own, and when she and Bessie reached home she threw herself on her bed in her little attic-room and cried as she had not cried since the fatal night that robbed her of everything.

The tears did her good. She was brighter and more herself after them, and when she went down to supper with Dan and his wife, as she had been bidden, though her eyes were very red, she was cheerful and composed.

Bessie was bursting with impatience to tell her what she had to say, but half afraid how it might be taken.

"Miss Darlington wants a dresser," she said, at length. "Do you think you would like to go to her?"

Nellie had seen the name of Miss Darlington on every hoarding in London, and had read newspaper critiques on her acting, praising her to the skies, but she had never seen the lady. She was a new actress, who had had her training in America, and had taken London by storm with her grace and beauty. She was said to have had very little experience, but her genius and talent were undoubted. Added to all this she was said to be a pure, good woman, no small recommendation in these days of glittering vice and the preference of dress and beauty to honest worth.

"A dresser?" Nellie said, in some alarm. "That's a lady's maid, isn't it?"

"Something like it, but only in the theatre. No one would know anything about it but ourselves."

"And Miss Darlington is a kind, good young lady," struck in Dan, who had been busy with his supper till he caught the dismayed tone of Nellie's voice. "She's none of your flighty ones; she's as considerate of everyone about her as can be; she'd never do a thing to hurt your feelings."

"But I shouldn't do for the situation," Nellie said, in dismay. "I don't know how to dress anybody."

"I could show you all that is wanted in an hour," Bessie said. "You'll soon get used to the stage dresses and how to fold them, and so on, and Miss Darlington has everything proper. Her boxes are all made for the things, and there's no trouble in keeping them in order."

"But there'd be hairdressing," Nellie demurred, "I could not do that."

"Not very much, it's mostly wigs—you'll soon learn. Look here, my dear, I can guess just how you feel about this. You have had a maid yourself, and it comes hard to think of being a servant to someone else. But it will be easy service and it will keep you."

"Yes, that it will," Dan said, "it's twelve shillings a week, Miss Smith—and she won't stick at that. She's a generous creature, is Miss Darlington."

"Are you sure she will have me?"

"She said she would have anyone of Bessie's sending. She was awfully put about with the woman she had. She got drunk only last week, and wasn't fit for her business and nearly spoiled one of her best scenes by not being where she was wanted."

"I shouldn't do any mischief in that way," Nellie said, quietly. "You are right, Bessie, it is only pride that is keeping me back. If the lady will have me I will go to her."

She went with Bessie the next day to the "Wellington," and penetrated for the first time in her life behind the scenes of a theatre.

Miss Darlington had rehearsals on, and would be able to speak to them between the scenes.

Nellie was surprised at her appearance. She had somehow expected a woman of at least thirty years of age. She saw a girl scarce older than herself, very quietly but richly dressed, and with a face as good as it was beautiful—a face too that Nellie was sure she had seen somewhere before.

While she was racking her brains to recollect the young lady finished her business and came to where she was standing.

"Is this the young person?" she asked of Bessie.

"Yes, miss."

"Come to my dressing-room, please. We can talk better there."

They followed her, Nellie wondering much at all she saw, and more than all at the luxurious room into which they were ushered, with its soft carpets and mirrors and all the comforts of a well-furnished boudoir.

"Sit down," Miss Darlington said, and Nellie thought she seemed rather at a loss what to say. There was a scared look on her face as if she were startled, and she evidently wanted to get rid of Bessie. That little person was not slow of comprehension, and she settled the matter at once.

"Shall I leave Miss Smith with you, miss?" she asked. "You'll want to talk to her maybe."

"Oh, do, please, Mrs. O'Callagan," was the instant reply. "I'll bring her to you in a minute or two. Tell them where I am, will you? I shan't be wanted just yet I know. They have the music to go through before I go on again."

Bessie went her way and shut the door, and the actress turned with an agitated look to Nellie.

"I knew you in a minute," she said. "You are Miss Rivers of Milverstone."

Nellie was going to falter out a faint denial, but the girl went on, hurriedly:

"Don't be afraid of me. I won't tell anybody if you don't like, but it is you I know."

"I don't remember you, I think," Nellie said, though she was beginning to think she did. "Is it possible you can be Amy Hastings?"

"That's just who I am, and—"

"You are mistaken about me," Nellie said, quietly. "I am not Miss Rivers, I am—"

"You'll always be Miss Rivers to me. I have heard all about that wretched business. I am so glad you have come to me. If you will let me help you I will."

(To be Continued.)



[HER DELIVERER.]

A BROKEN KEY.

(A COMPLETE STORY).

CHAPTER I.

THE REQUEST.

On the afternoon of a cold, cheerless day in the month of October a hired fly drove up a magnificent avenue of elms towards a country house in the county of Bedfordshire.

This house, standing in the midst of magnificent grounds, was the property of Mr. Bridesale, and was known as Oaklands Hall. The property attached to it exceeded four thousand acres, and this gentleman's income was at least six thousand a year.

The Bridesales were an old race, and the house had withstood the attacks of Cromwell's army during the civil war which brought about the Commonwealth.

Old Daniel Bridesale was childless, he having never been married, and people said he was a hard, stern man, who liked to live his life in his own selfish way. But the end was drawing near.

He had seen threescore years and ten, his silvery hairs were laid low on the pillow of a sick bed, and Daniel Bridesale was dying.

There was only one person he had expressed a wish to see before he breathed his last, and that was his pretty niece, Grace Godfrey, for whom his housekeeper, Miss Ross, had telegraphed to come down from London and see her uncle before he died.

Grace Godfrey was in the hired fly which was driving up the ancient avenue as the autumnal blast sighed and moaned among the branches of the gnarled, fantastic trees, and as the storm wrack, threatening rain, swept the surface of the leaden sky she felt a chill go right through her heart.

Her uncle had never shown her any great kindness. It was not in his nature to do so, for,

as we have said, he was a hard, cold man. Yet he had often invited her to spend a portion of her holidays at the Hall, and he had occasionally kissed her, and patted her fair, curly head, and said she would grow up a beauty.

"More's the pity," he would add. "What is the use of beauty? It only enables a girl to break men's hearts."

Perhaps if one knew Uncle Bridesale's history, and could dive back into the buried past, it would have been found that he had met with a disappointment in love, which had marred his prospects in life and so soured his nature.

Uncle Dan, as she called him, had a nephew as well as a niece, but he had not seen him for years. Using his influence at headquarters, he had procured him an appointment in an East Indian company's service, and Robert Newton, the nephew in question, was away on duty in the distant East.

Grace Godfrey had not belied the prediction of the old man, for she had indeed grown up a beauty, and at the age of seventeen there was not a prettier girl to be found than she was. Her type of loveliness was the pure Saxon—full face, well-chiselled features, blue eyes, small mouth, dimpled cheeks, and a perfect wealth of flax-coloured hair, which made every lover of the blonde style rave about her.

Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey, her mother and father, had great expectations from Uncle Daniel, for they fully believed that their daughter would find a corner in his will, so it can be easily believed that they were greatly excited when Miss Ross's telegram arrived announcing the old gentleman's illness.

Mr. Godfrey was a doctor in a small way of practice in a London suburb, and it was just as much as he could do to make money enough to pay his way. Grace was now a young lady, and if she did not get married he could not afford to keep her at home. Consequently the dismal prospect of going out as a governess had frequently been held out to her.

Grace was not by any means a mercenary girl, but, grieved as she was at her uncle's serious

condition, she hoped that if it should please Heaven to take him away he would leave her some money, because then she could marry a young man to whom she was greatly attached.

This was Arthur Arundel, a clerk in a China house. He lived near her father's home, and there was a mutual affection between them, but marriage was out of the question, as his salary was only thirty shillings a week and she had nothing. Her father would not keep them if they got married, and if Uncle Dan left her nothing they would only go on cherishing a hopeless passion.

As the fly proceeded up the avenue, the clouds grew darker and the rain-charged atmosphere denser. The rooks flew low, uttering their melancholy notes, and a few drops of moisture pattered on the roadway.

It was evidently going to be a wet and stormy night.

Presently the fly drew up at the flight of stone steps below the portico, and Grace Godfrey alighted, paying the driver liberally, much to his satisfaction. Her valise she carried in her hand, and, mounting the steps in the gathering twilight, she timidly rang the bell, whose tinkling echoes sounded wild and ghostly in the gloomy corridors within.

The summons was answered by Miss Ross, the housekeeper, in person, who, after shaking hands with Grace, kissed her with the affection of an old friend.

"I am so glad you have come, miss," she exclaimed. "Your uncle has been always asking for you, and I was afraid you would be too late."

"Too late?" repeated Grace. "Is my poor, dear uncle so bad as that?"

"The doctor says he will not last out the night."

"Then I shall be unable to nurse him to convalescence as I had hoped," Grace said, as the tears came to her eyes.

"Your presence may do him some good, though I can scarcely venture to hope so. He is sensible, but speechless. He looks at me whenever I enter the room as if to ask if you had

come yet. He has something on his mind, I am sure. Will you take your things off in my room, which you must require after your journey, and have some tea?"

"Never mind that. I will see my uncle at once."

"As you please," rejoined Miss Ross.

She led the way upstairs, and conducted her to the apartment of the sick man, in which a fire was burning. A couple of candles dimly illuminated the chamber, in one corner of which was a large Arabian bedstead, on which reclined the wasted form of the wealthy Daniel Bridesale.

Dr. Mortimore, the physician, who had a large local practice and reputation, was in attendance, and as Grace hesitated on the threshold he beckoned her forward.

Mr. Bridesale seemed to be in a state of collapse, but he no sooner heard the rustle of her dress, the soft frou-frou of the corded silk, than he turned his eyes in her direction, and a smile played around the attenuated lips, parched with an inward fire.

Yet he could not speak. The stroke of paralysis which had deadened one half of his body had affected his tongue, and the power of speech had passed from him for ever.

One hand was outside the bed, extended upon the sheet, and she remarked that it was tightly clenched as if something was contained within.

"Uncle," she exclaimed, "I am sorry to see you like this. Do you not know your loving Grace?"

He nodded his head feebly as if to reply in the affirmative, and bending down her head she kissed the withered hand which, in years gone by, had so often tenderly stroked her sliken hair.

Unfolding his hand he disclosed a small key, which he pressed into her grasp.

"What is this?" asked Grace Godfrey, in surprise.

There was no answer from the paralytic.

"Evidently it is for you," said Dr. Mortimore. "He has held that key tenaciously ever since his seizure. You must keep it."

"What am I to do with it?"

"That time alone will solve."

Grace put the little key in her pocket and again a satisfied smile played around the lips of the dying man.

She sat down by the bedside and talked pleasantly about those at home, to the palpable satisfaction of the invalid, whose sense of hearing was not impaired, and she read some prayers to him, which seemed to please him greatly.

This lasted for two hours, when she was compelled to withdraw in order to procure that refreshment which a growing faintness told her she stood sorely in need of.

"It is very odd," she remarked, as she drank a refreshing cup of tea, "that uncle should give me that old key."

"Perhaps his mind is weak, my dear," replied Miss Ross. "He has exhibited signs of childishness for some weeks past."

"I shall keep it however."

"Yes. There is no knowing what it may mean."

Half an hour passed.

Dr. Mortimore hurriedly entered the room, without stopping to knock, and the women could see from the expression of his face that something had happened.

"Is he worse?" Grace asked, rising from her chair.

"It is all over," replied the doctor, adding, "Calm yourself, I beg, my dear Miss Godfrey."

Grace covered her face with her hands, for she acutely felt the loss of her dear, old kind uncle, under whose roof she had spent some of the happiest hours of her life. Daniel Bridesale had been seized with another attack of paralysis, in which he had breathed his last, at a ripe old age; his time had come, and he was gathered to his fathers, as the beautiful words of Scripture have it.

That night Grace slept with Miss Ross.

In the morning she had an interview with the family solicitor, who promised to make all the arrangements for the funeral, and she left the

Hall to seek shelter with some friends in the immediate neighbourhood.

These were Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing, who owned a handsome property and, being on intimate terms with Mr. Bridesale, had known her since she was a little girl in short frocks.

Effie Stebbing was a little younger than herself, and they had been playfellows together. It had once been proposed that Grace should be Effie's governess, but her mother and father would not then consent to part with her.

The Stebbings received her very kindly and willingly accepted her as a guest until the funeral took place, which event was to occur with much pomp and ceremony in a week's time.

It was naturally supposed that Grace would be an heiress, as Mr. Bridesale would at least divide his wealth between his niece and his nephew, Robert Newton, who was still away in the East, if he did not bequeath it all to her, for it was known that he was not altogether satisfied with the accounts he had lately received of Mr. Newton's conduct.

The latter was represented as being very wild, and it was even rumoured that he had lost his situation through the careless way in which he kept the books of the firm by whom he had been employed.

Grace did not attend the funeral, but she visited the Hall to hear the will read. Some distant male relations followed the remains to the grave, and Grace waited with their wives to hear how the deceased had left his money.

To say that she had not great expectations would be to ignore the fact that she fully believed she would be Daniel Bridesale's heiress.

Immense then was her disappointment to find on the will being read that her late uncle had devised all he was possessed of to Robert Newton, merely leaving her an old oaken cabinet, which stood in her drawing-room, as a mark of his esteem and a keepsake, which would serve to make her remember him.

Concealing her chagrin as well as she could, Grace Godfrey drew her crape veil over her face and, leaning on Miss Ross's arm, walked into the hall.

"It's a shame," said the housekeeper. "But don't take on, dear; perhaps you will be just as well off in the long run. Riches don't always bring happiness."

"Mamma and papa will be so disappointed," murmured Grace, "and I shall have to go out as a teacher. Papa only kept me at home to see what Uncle Daniel would do."

"Be brave, fight your own battle, as I have had to do," replied Miss Ross. "What shall I do with the cabinet?"

"Nasty old thing," cried Grace. "I'm sure I don't want it."

"Shall I send it to your father's house?"

"If you like."

"Very well, I will do so."

Miss Ross kissed her good bye and assisted her into the carriage, which at once drove off to Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing's. Once in the carriage she burst into a flood of blinding tears, for she could no longer conceal her vexation.

By the time she reached the residence of her friends she had contrived to conceal her emotion, for her pride would not allow her to reveal all she felt. It was indeed a great blow to her. She had expected to meet Effie Stebbing on terms of equality. Now she was poorer than before, because she had not her expectations. Everyone believed she would be the inheritor of old Daniel Bridesale's thousands, for he had frequently expressed his intention in public of leaving her all he had.

Concealing her mortified spirit and aching heart with a smiling exterior, she entered the house, when Effie came running eagerly up to her.

"Well," she exclaimed, "I suppose I am to congratulate you, dear."

"On what?" asked Grace Godfrey, calmly.

"Upon being the lucky one."

"On the contrary," said Grace, with amused indifference. "Mr. Robert Newton is the one who has found favour in my uncle's eyes."

"Is it possible? I am so sorry, dear. But if you are left out in the cold you can always find

a home here, to teach your humble servant out of the abundance of your knowledge and accomplishments."

"Do you mean that, Effie dear?"

"Certainly I do. Mamma was only talking about it this morning, when imagining the possibility of your not getting the inheritance."

"Thank you, darling. I accept your offer, but I shall have to go home first. In a few days I will come back and be your governess. You will find a very strict one in me, I warn you," replied Grace.

"I am not afraid," answered Effie, laughing.

Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing heartily commiserated the disappointed girl and sincerely repeated the offer which their daughter had made, so that when Grace Godfrey went back home that afternoon it was fully arranged that she was to take up her residence in a week beneath their roof as instructress to Effie.

On her return she communicated the result of the reading of the will to her parents, who were more vexed than she, and their remarks respecting the late Mr. Daniel Bridesale were the reverse of complimentary.

"My brother might have left us something," remarked Mrs. Godfrey. "Grace has waited on him like a slave."

"We should have done some good with the money," replied her husband, "while, from all accounts, Robert Newton is not the kind of young man to deserve a fortune."

"I shall not be a burden on you, papa," said Grace.

"You must not be, my dear child. I cannot afford it," answered her father.

"Mrs. Stebbing has engaged me to teach Effie."

"When do you go?"

"Next week."

Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey made no objection to this arrangement, as they felt it was the best thing she could do under the circumstances.

Grace was very silent all day, as if absorbed by her thoughts. In reality she was thinking of Arthur Arundel, the young gentleman to whom she was engaged. He had always been led to believe that she would be an heiress, and she had some doubts as to his sincerity. Grace was much attached to the handsome young man, but her instincts told her she had a great deal to fear in her altered circumstances. It is not every man who is willing to wed a penniless girl, and now she could bring him nothing but her fond love and undying affection.

Every day she expected a visit from him. The suspense made her positively ill, for she was sure she could bear the certainty of his coolness better than the uncertainty she was at present labouring under.

Two days after her arrival at her suburban home—her father being away on business connected with his profession—a van drove up to the door, containing the cabinet which her uncle had left her in his will, and which Miss Ross, according to promise, had sent her.

Mrs. Godfrey received the ancient thing, which was not very prepossessing, and, with an ill grace, paid the money for its carriage from Oaklands Hall to London, having it placed in the drawing-room.

The apartment was handsomely furnished, but, like many another drawing-room in suburban homes, only used on grand occasions.

It being a fine morning, Mrs. Godfrey opened the window to let in what little sun there was, so as to have a better view of Uncle Bridesale's cabinet.

Outside, the sun glinted on the fir trees, the Chili pines, and the fountains, in the centre of which rose a statue of Venus Aphrodite, rising from the sea, holding a conch shell in her hand, through which the water fell into the marble basin, while, with the other, she was apparently smoothing the tresses of her long, wavy hair.

When the old oaken cabinet had been placed to her satisfaction Mrs. Godfrey was able to bestow upon its carving some slight commendation, and thought that, after all, she despised bequest might have some value in the eye of a connoisseur.

When Grace came downstairs, in obedience to

a summons from her mother, she found that worthy lady trying to open the door of the cabinet with a bunch of old keys, none of which, however, would fit the lock.

"Bother the thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Godfrey, impatiently. "I wonder what there is inside it."

"Nothing of any importance, mamma," replied Grace.

"How do you know?"

"Uncle Daniel used to keep his tobacco in it. You are aware that he was a great smoker."

"Yes."

"Well, inside that cabinet—I have seen it open hundreds of times—he kept, in different drawers, various brands of cigars, and different smoking tobaccos."

"In that case it is a funny present for you."

"It is indeed," said Grace.

"I wish I could open it."

Grace bethought herself of the key which her uncle had so mysteriously given her on his death-bed, and, feeling in the pocket of her travelling dress, which she had on, produced it.

"Perhaps this will do," she exclaimed. "It was uncle's gift to me, though he did not tell me what to do with it."

"Try," said Mrs. Godfrey, laconically.

It was a very slender key, and slightly bent. Noting this defect after she had unsuccessfully tried the door of the cabinet with it, Grace endeavoured to straighten it by placing it on a marble-topped table and striking it with a heavy glass paper weight.

While she was thus engaged the servant entered.

"Mr. Arthur Arundel," she announced.

On hearing this name Grace became greatly agitated, and trembled like a leaf.

"Make haste," said her mother.

In her distraction at her mother's urgency, and the utterance of her lover's name, Grace struck the key so hard that she broke it.

"Dear me, how tiresome!" she exclaimed.

"What have you done?" asked Mrs. Godfrey.

"The key is broken."

"What a pity. Give me the pieces, I will have them mended."

"It is not worth it."

Grace heard her lover's footsteps in the passage, and, going to the open window, threw the two pieces of the broken key into the garden.

"What did you do that for?" asked Mrs. Godfrey.

"There is nothing in the cabinet, and the key is useless," replied Grace. "Please don't worry me about trifles, mamma."

Mrs. Godfrey stepped out on the lawn, the window opening in the Venetian style, and looked in every direction for the pieces of the broken key, but without being able to find them.

They had completely disappeared.

Where Grace could have thrown them she had not the remotest idea, and, after a close search, she retired to the morning-room, leaving her daughter to talk to Arthur Arundel alone, as she knew that her presence would only be a restraint upon both of them.

The fountain splashed and bubbled in the sunbeams, in which the Venus Aphrodite looked like polished marble fresh from the famous quarries of Carrara.

The broken key was forgotten.

CHAPTER II.

DISAPPOINTED LOVE.

TALL, handsome, with flashing, penetrating eyes and short, curly hair, well dressed, aristocratic in appearance, Arthur Arundel was a man that any woman might be proud to love.

But, handsome though he undoubtedly was, Mr. Arundel was of a mercenary nature. He was poor, and dependent on his parents. He liked his power over women, and determined

to use it to his advantage, for his father had, early in life, impressed upon him that his only chance of getting on was to make a good marriage.

The words had sunk deep into his calculating heart.

He was not an impressionable man, and did not fall head over ears in love with every pretty girl he met.

It is fair to infer that he liked Grace Godfrey as well if not better than any girl he had ever seen, but the prospect of Dan Bridesale's thousands was more attractive to him than her undeniable beauty.

Rumours had reached him, since his return to his father's house, of her disinheritance, and he had called to learn the truth of them from her own lips.

Placing his hat and his crutch stick on the table he kissed her rather coldly on the cheek, causing a shiver to run through her frame, as a presentiment of what was to come entered her mind.

"Your uncle is dead," he exclaimed, abruptly. "Yes," replied Grace. "You are correctly informed, Arthur, and he has left all his fortune to Robert Newton."

"The scapegrace nephew in India, eh?"

"Exactly."

Arthur Arundel toyed restlessly with a diamond ring which he wore on the third finger of his left hand.

"That is unfortunate for you, my child," he remarked, calmly, studying the pattern of the carpet.

"Do you love me any the less on that account?" she asked, catching her breath and placing her hand on her heart to still its beating.

"Oh, no, not at all. It makes no alteration in my affection for you," he replied. "But, at the same time, I think our engagement ought to be broken off."

"Have you called to say that?"

"Not altogether. You see, my darling, I am poor and cannot afford to keep a wife at present."

"Oh, Arthur!"

"It is a melancholy fact, Grace."

"Am I to understand that you want a wife to keep you?" she answered, with some spirit.

A slight flush reddened his ordinarily pale face.

"I don't think you ought to put it in that way," he said, in some confusion. "You know the old story about love in a cottage?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, it is simple enough. When poverty comes in at the door love flies out of the window. In a case of this sort we must put sentiment on one side. I do not wish to hamper you in any way. A handsome girl like yourself might marry a lord."

"I do not want to marry a lord," answered Grace, who was more than half inclined to cry.

"But you could. I am dependant on my father, and until I acquire the means of making a wife happy it would be a sin and a crime for me to marry."

These were his father's words, and the young man had carefully rehearsed them.

"I see how it is; you have heard that I am poor, the rumour has been confirmed by me, and you are mean enough to break off the match," said Grace.

"I am studying your interests."

"You are thinking of yourself."

"Do not misjudge me," exclaimed Arthur Arundel. "Why should I make you miserable?"

"With your love I could never be so."

"What have we to live on? With my small income we should have only bread and cheese," he replied.

"That is enough."

"Nonsense, my dear. Though your father is in moderate circumstances you have every luxury that middle-class people can expect, and I should be a brute indeed if I took you from so comfortable a home to live in a back garret on next to nothing."

Grace Godfrey burst into tears, being unable to contain herself any longer, and her handkerchief was brought into requisition.

Like most men, Arthur Arundel hated to see a woman cry, though it was not the first time it had happened in his experience.

"Don't cry, my pet," he exclaimed.

"I c—can't h—help it," she sobbed.

He rose from his chair, and putting his arm round her waist with some of the old-time affection, tried to kiss her, but she pushed him away.

"Don't k—kiss," she said. "I—I wouldn't k—kiss a p—pauper if I were you."

"You misunderstand me, Grace."

"No, no, I don't. I understand you too well."

He looked perplexed, as he afterwards said to a friend of his confidentially:

"Women are awful bores, you know, all heart and that sort of thing. A fellow doesn't know how to manage them. Deuce take 'em."

It was impossible to stop the rapid flow of Grace Godfrey's tears, and, fearful lest she might become hysterical and make a scene, he determined to put an end to the interview.

"Grace," he exclaimed, "I must go."

"Go!" she replied, emphatically.

"I have an appointment."

"Keep it by all means. You are unworthy of any girl's love."

"Do not be hard on me. I will try to get something to do which will enable me to keep you and dress you as you deserve. In the meantime I reluctantly release you from your engagement. Good bye for the present, my darling, and God bless you."

He raised one of her hands to his lips and kissed it in a very stately manner, after which he took up his hat and stick and left the room.

It was thus they parted.

In this odd, theatrical manner, just as if they had been playing at charades, all her hopes in life were blasted, and she learnt to her sorrow how much dependence there was to be placed on a man's protestations and a man's love.

As a matter of course she confided her grief to her mother, who sympathised with her in her trouble.

In a few days she got over it, coming to the conclusion that Arthur Arundel was not worthy of the pure love she had lavished upon him. Still she could not forget him. It is not in a woman's power to all at once drink the waters of oblivion where the heart is concerned.

In a week came a change of scene and occupation. She went to Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing's and threw her whole soul into the work in which she had engaged.

Being an accomplished linguist and musician she was able to greatly improve Effie, whose studies had been somewhat neglected, and in trying to do her duty to her employers she exhibited so much zeal that Effie found her a little hard and severe. It was not to be wondered at. She wanted to forget her troubles in her work, and as a natural consequence Effie had to suffer for it, but it was all for her good in the end.

Time passed on with leaden wings. The news of his good fortune had been telegraphed to Mr. Robert Newton in India, and that promising young gentleman had in haste returned to England to take possession of his property. He was fond of a country life, and the hunting and shooting season not yet being over, he assembled a party of friends at the Hall to enjoy the sports which the country always affords in the winter.

Effie Stebbing was the first to hear of his arrival. She instantly communicated the news to her governess, who took little or no interest in Mr. Newton's coming to live at Oaklands.

What was Robert Newton to her? or, for the matter of that, what was she to him? She nursed a secret and hidden grief, and her greatest consolation when lessons were over and she could shut down the lid of the piano, or close Magnall's Questions, was to go upstairs to her room, lock the door, take a photograph of Arthur Arundel out of her box, and cry over it,

after which she would kneel down and pray to Heaven that she might forget him.

Still she could not forget him. Whenever she received a letter from her parents the only paragraph which at all interested her was something relating to Arthur. He had ridden in a steeple chase, won a bicycle match, flirted with some girl she knew, or borrowed some money which he was unable to pay.

If she thought at all of Mr. Newton it was not with a feeling of resentment because he had got the property she thought she was entitled to. She was far too good-hearted a girl for that, and she admitted to herself that her uncle had a perfect right to do as he liked with his own.

As a matter of fact she never expected that she would see him, or that their destinies would be entwined in any way whatever.

Nevertheless it was their fate to meet. Some few weeks after Mr. Robert Newton's arrival from India to take possession of his estate Grace Godfrey strolled into the country to make a sketch, and there were no landscapes she loved so well as those in the spacious park of Oaklands.

Thinking she was doing no harm, and utterly disregarding the law of trespass, she wandered through those sylvan glades which had been so dear to her in the sweet days of her never-to-be-forgotten girlhood, when life was so bright to her as the welcome guest and chosen heiress of old Mr. Bridesale.

Sitting down in a secluded spot on the trunk of a fallen tree she arranged her drawing-book on her knee, and took her pencils out of the case, with the undulating park land stretching out before her in a beautiful vista, a lake dotted with islands in the distance, the deer browsing amidst the fern, and the rooks cawing over the lowlands.

She had not been at work more than ten minutes when she heard the deer making a peculiar noise. A stag with large antlers was running wildly about, as stags will at some periods of the year, and after charging other deer came near Grace, who rose hastily and tried to escape.

This was not easily done. The stag was close upon her, and would in all probability have gored her had not a gun been suddenly fired in its direction, the shot taking effect in its heart and causing it to roll over and over—dead.

Miss Godfrey had scarcely recovered from her astonishment when a handsome young gentleman, dressed in a felt hat, black velvet coat and waistcoat, with corduroy trousers, and carrying a gun in his hand, appeared upon the scene. His face was bronzed as if by exposure to a tropical sun, and his features were somewhat hard for one so young.

"I hope you are not hurt," he exclaimed, raising his hat politely.

"Not in the least, thanks to your skill," replied Grace.

"Oh, that is nothing. I am admitted to be a dead shot, and I can put a horse at a five-barred gate, if I can do nothing else."

Grace was wondering who the good-looking stranger was who had saved her from serious injury in so timely a manner.

"I am sorry," he continued, "that one of my stags should have frightened you so much, but they are dangerous just now."

One of his stags!

Grace thought she should faint, for the words convinced her that she was in the presence of the new owner of Oaklands.

It could be no other than Mr. Robert Newton who stood before her, and how curiously they had come in contact.

She turned deadly pale, perceiving which, the gentleman politely offered his arm to her, saying:

"Permit me to offer you some support; you are faint. Do you live far from here?"

"Not very far. I do not require assistance," she replied.

"Do you not overrate your strength?"

"Not in the least. I live at Mrs. Stebbing's. I am the governess."

Uttering the words, she looked at him stead-

fastly, and saw his eyes dilate with astonishment.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "Then you are Miss Godfrey. I have heard of you, and I presume, you have already divined who I am."

"Mr. Robert Newton, I believe, and my cousin."

"Precisely."

There was an awkward pause, which was embarrassing to both of them, during which Grace picked up her portfolio, the pictures in which had been scattered while she was running away from the deer.

"May I have the honour of calling upon you?" added the young man.

"Certainly, if you desire to do so."

"It would give me great pleasure."

Grace bowed her head in token of assent, and, with as much dignity as she could command under the circumstances, tripped away over the green sward in the direction of her home, feeling in her heart that Mr. Newton admired her; but of this she said nothing to Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing or Effie, merely stating that she had been chased by a stag, which the new proprietor of the Hall had shot.

"So you have seen him," said Mrs. Stebbing. "What do you think of him?"

"He is not bad looking, by any means," replied Grace.

"I recollect him very well before he went to India," remarked Effie. "But I suppose he is greatly changed."

"Yes, indeed," answered Grace, bending over some work she was doing, "so much so that I did not know him."

"There was a time when he affected to admire Effie," continued Mrs. Stebbing. "He was quite a youth then, and I discouraged his attentions. He would be a good match now."

"Oh! mamma!" said Effie, blushing.

"You know you always liked him, my dear," persisted Mrs. Stebbing, "and you have his photo in your album now. We must ask him to dinner."

"He intimated his intention to call," observed Grace.

"Really! That is a sign that he has not forgotten our little Effie. It is time she thought of a husband, and Mr. Newton must want to settle. If they can love one another, decidedly there ought to be a match between those two."

Neither of the girls made any reply to this remark, and worthy Mrs. Stebbing fell into a reverie, which made her picture her daughter the happy and fortunate mistress of Oaklands Hall.

Mr. Newton did call in a few days' time, but, contrary to the expectation of the ambitious, match-making mother, he did not pay the slightest attention to Effie, all his looks and conversation being directed towards Miss Godfrey, who received his manifest advances with a chilly reserve which was almost prudish.

Mr. Robert Newton could not understand this, because he had always been a great flirt, and had had considerable success in breaking girls' hearts. In fact he might have been married well a dozen times, if he had not preferred keeping his liberty to being in silken feathers.

Thoroughly piqued by her conduct, which, to him, was inexplicable, as, by accepting him, she would gain possession of the estate which she had believed would be hers, he determined to sound her affections and ask her point blank if she would be his wife.

It was his opinion that, feeling herself in a dependent position, she did not believe it possible that he would stoop to notice her, and that she did not really understand the nature of his behaviour towards her.

Mrs. Stebbing and Effie saw that Robert Newton was smitten and their hearts were filled with jealousy.

Grace's conduct, however, was so decorous that they could not find any fault with her, as it was impossible to say that she afforded him the slightest encouragement. So they watched and waited, though Grace could not help seeing that their behaviour to her was strangely altered from what it was when, at her uncle's death, she became an inmate of their house.

"He doesn't care for you; he's after Miss Godfrey, who, I am sure, secretly encourages him," exclaimed Mrs. Stebbing.

"He is only distantly polite to me," replied Effie, "but I am sure I don't care."

"It is disgraceful, my dear. I shall send that girl away. She has no gratitude, and entirely forgets all we have done for her."

"Do not do anything in a hurry, mamma. Wait—do, please," urged Effie.

"I will speak to her to-day. Where is she?"

Effie looked out of the window, and a cold shiver ran through her slender frame as she saw Grace and Mr. Newton standing together under the spreading branches of a cedar tree.

They were conversing in a serious manner, and Robert's gaze was intently fixed upon her.

Effie pointed in the direction of the lawn, and her mother's eyes followed her outstretched hand.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Mrs. Stebbing. "Things have come to a pretty pass when he talks to her openly on the lawn in sight of everybody, without having previously called at the house. I don't like it, and shall give her a piece of my mind when she comes in."

In less than a minute Mr. Newton raised his hat politely and, with a distracted air, walked rapidly away down the garden.

Grace returned to the house and entered the drawing-room, looking flushed and worried.

"Nice goings on," remarked Mrs. Stebbing.

"Did you speak to me?" asked Grace, mildly.

"Yes, I did, and I think I have cause to do so," replied Mrs. Stebbing. "Do you think that people haven't eyes and cannot see? How dare you flirt with young Mr. Newton when you know what my plans in regard to him and Effie were?"

"Pardon me, I have never flirted with Mr. Newton. Effie is perfectly welcome to him, though I do not see why I should be debarred from speaking to a gentleman because you want him to marry your daughter."

"What impudence," said Mrs. Stebbing, who was almost speechless with indignation. "Here are you, a penniless dependent, trying to catch one of the richest men in the county."

Grace grew still more red in the face, but she drove back the indignation which was nearly choking her.

"You are wrong again," she said. "Mr. Newton has proposed to me and—"

"Infamous, artful hussey," interrupted Mrs. Stebbing. "Get out of my house this instant, you viper!"

"Permit me to finish my sentence."

"Well?"

"I have refused him," continued Grace, quietly.

Mrs. Stebbing gazed at her with blank amazement, as this statement was so entirely different from anything she had expected to hear.

"As to leaving your house," Grace went on, "that I will do with pleasure, as I could not stay another hour under your roof, though I beg to thank you for your kindness to me since my poor uncle's death."

With a queenly dignity all her own she quitted the room to pack up her trunk.

Mrs. Stebbing had a great mind to call her back and apologise after hearing the truth, but she thought this would lower her, and she refrained from exercising her charitable instinct.

Grace was allowed to leave the drawing-room without a word. She did not give way to tears, though she was half-inclined to cry at losing her situation, for she knew her mother would be too much annoyed to receive her kindly. She was also fully aware that she would be severely blamed for refusing the offer of marriage with which Robert Newton had favoured her, but her heart was still entirely devoted to Arthur Arundel, in spite of the cruel way in which he had treated her.

She was far too pure in mind and artless to give her hand where her heart could never be, and this was why she had rejected Mr. Newton.

When she had finished packing her trunks Effie came with a gentle knock at the door.

"Who is there?" asked Grace.

"Only I, Effie," was the reply.

"Please come in, dear," said Grace, who did not blame her pupil for her mother's scant courtesy and rude remarks.

Effie entered with a piece of paper in her hand.

"Mamma has sent you a cheque for your services," said Effie, "and the carriage will be at the door in five minutes to take you to the station."

"Thank you."

"And I am so sorry, dear, you are going. What shall I do without you? It was very unkind of mamma to suspect you, but she is so hasty, and she is now prepared to admit that you acted honourably."

"Never mind me," said Grace, "I am best out of the way. You can then prosecute your designs on Mr. Newton's susceptible heart."

"I don't like him any more than you do, dear, but mamma says he is rich and—"

"Mrs. Stebbing is quite right, from a worldly point of view. Unfortunately, I cannot be worldly. Do not think any worse of Mr. Newton because I refused him."

Grace smiled faintly as she said this, and Effie burst into tears, which Grace considerably kissed away.

Ten minutes afterwards she was in the carriage and being driven to the station, and before the shades of night fell she was knocking at the door of the paternal mansion, wondering how she would be received.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD CABINET.

Doctor and Mrs. Godfrey received Grace with a considerable show of affection, but when they heard her story they did not extend her that sympathy which she thought she had a right to expect.

It was evident that they fancied her silly in refusing the offer of Robert Newton, and it was equally clear that they did not care about having her at home, as the doctor was not in very good health and his practice had declined in consequence.

Grace was hopeful that she would soon procure another situation, but she found this more difficult to obtain than she had expected, as the labour market for women was overcrowded.

Her little stock of money was soon expended in advertising and running about from place to place.

Weeks slipped by. She heard nothing of Arthur Arundel, except that he had gone abroad. People said that he was an enterprising fellow and sure to get on in Australia, which colony was the field he had chosen for his labours.

Grace looked upon him as lost to her for ever, because he was certain to meet more girls out there, and would probably marry as soon as he could afford to do so, forgetting all about the maiden to whom he had plighted his troth in the springtime of his youth.

But though no news came of Arthur she was startled by the intelligence that Robert Newton was engaged to Miss Effie Stebbing, which proved that his passion for Grace could not have been very enduring.

Her mother grew cross and petulant, her father was seldom at home. In time her clothes became shabby, and she had no money to buy more.

If she answered an advertisement in person she was compelled to walk, and in a short time she suffered all the agonies of genteel poverty.

"Really, Grace," said her mother one day, "you must exert yourself. Let me see. How long have you been at home now? Nearly six months, and you are quite a drag upon your poor father. You ought to be able to help him. It was only yesterday he was summoned for taxes."

Grace heaved a deep sigh, and her pale, troubled face showed how much she felt her mother's remarks, but she made no reply.

"I believe," continued Mrs. Godfrey, "that you are fretting after Arthur Arundel and don't want to get anything to do."

A sudden pain shot through the girl's heart at the mention of this name, which was still so dear to her.

"Please don't talk of him," she exclaimed.

"Yes, I shall," replied her mother, snappishly, as if she found a pleasure in inflicting pain on her. "That man has thrown a blight upon your life. You will never see him again. It is folly to waste a thought upon one who gave you up so coolly when he knew your prospects of becoming rich had vanished, and treated you as he did."

"I cannot bear this," said Grace, pressing her hands upon her breast, as if to still the violent beating of her heart.

She rose and walked out into the garden.

The fountain was still there and the Venus shone as usual in the sunshine, but the basin was empty. The Venus had been neglected lately and had got out of order, so that the water would not flow as of old.

Looking pensively into the marble receptacle, Grace saw two pieces of iron and carelessly picked them up.

"The broken key," she cried.

It was indeed the halves of the key which her uncle had given her on his death bed and which she had thrown away in a fit of temper when she could not open the old cabinet.

They had fallen into the water of the plashing fountain and that was why no one had been able to discover any trace of them.

Had it not been for the disorder and decay into which the Venus had fallen from neglect they might have passed observation for many years, as the weeds would have grown over them and the gold fish have swum around them without interruption.

Placing the fragments in her pocket, Grace, more for want of something better to do than anything else, put on her hat and went to a blacksmith, whom she asked to mend the key, so that she might try if she could open the old cabinet with it.

This relic of antiquity which her uncle bequeathed her, as a joke she fancied, still adorned the drawing-room, and the sight of the broken key once more roused her curiosity to see what it contained.

She waited while the smith did his work, paid the small sum he demanded, and went back to the house with the key, which she determined to use carefully this time.

Mrs. Godfrey was sitting on a sofa with a handkerchief in her hand, and her red, swollen eyes showed that she had been weeping.

It was not in Grace's nature to bear malice, and she tenderly kissed her parent, saying:

"Poor, dear mamma, you did not mean to scold your little girl, or speak unkindly, did you?"

"No, my child," Mrs. Godfrey replied. "My only wish was to rouse you to exertion."

"So you have, you dear old thing," cried Grace. "See. I have found the old broken key which Uncle Daniel gave me just before he died, and have had it mended. I am going to try to open the cabinet, just for fun."

"You won't find much in that rubbishy old piece of furniture, I'm thinking," said her mother.

"Who can tell?"

"I was going to sell it while you were away, but the man I called in offered me less than a pound, so I kept it."

Grace sank on her knees before the cabinet and delicately inserted the key. It was small and clean now, as the smith had filed it and sandpapered it after concluding his repairs, so that it entered the wards of the lock without difficulty.

One skillful turn caused the door to open and the interior was disclosed to view.

Mrs. Godfrey watched the operation with subdued interest.

It contained three shelves on which were several boxes of cigars, bundles of Manillas, and papers of cigarettes.

"Bah!" exclaimed Mrs. Godfrey. "I told you what you might expect. I do think my brother Dan must have been out of his mind

when he left you a thing like that. He always was eccentric."

Grace said nothing. She removed the boxes and bundles one by one, placing them on the carpet, and clearing one shelf after another.

Suddenly her eyes lighted on a roll of parchment tied with red tape and she uttered an exclamation of surprise as she seized and drew it to the light.

"What have you there?" asked her mother.

Grace read the endorsement.

"Last will and testament of Daniel Bridesale, of Oaklands Hall. Signed, sealed and attested this 14th day of June, in the year of Our Lord 1874."

"A will," said Mrs. Godfrey.

"Yes," replied Grace, whose eyes lighted up with a strange fire, "one made two years later than the one which gave Oaklands to Robert Newton."

With trembling fingers she untied the red tape and opened the parchment, over which she cast her eyes rapidly, soon finding that in this testamentary document Mr. Bridesale had left everything to his affectionate niece, Grace Godfrey. This will entirely superseded the previous one and was drawn and witnessed by a firm of London solicitors, whom he must have consulted during his visit to town. Naturally of a taciturn and sensitive disposition, he had said nothing to anyone about this will, and had hidden it away in his favourite cabinet on his return home.

His anxiety to see Grace when he was seized with paralysis was now easily explained, and his conduct in giving her the key was quite intelligible, because he remembered that in his first will he had given her the cabinet, at the time when Robert Newton was high in his favour, before he had heard of his bad behaviour abroad.

Grace could see it all now.

She was an heiress. Oaklands would be hers after all. She could provide for her struggling mother and father. There would be no more poverty, no more insults and reproaches, no more hunting for employment, weary walks and bitter disappointments—all these wretched things belonged to the miserable past.

"Congratulate me, mamma, kiss your lucky daughter," she exclaimed, handing her the will and throwing her arms round her neck.

"What on earth is all this fuss about?" demanded Mrs. Godfrey.

Grace explained everything just as she had unravelled it in her own mind, and while they were talking her father came in; they told him the good news, which delighted him beyond measure.

He took the will at once to the firm of solicitors whose names it bore and they assured him of the genuine nature of the testament, saying that Mr. Bridesale frequently entrusted business to them, and asserting that had they known Miss Godfrey was kept out of her rights they would promptly have come to tell her of the existence of the will, but they had heard nothing of Mr. Newton's usurpation, under a prior will, of her undoubted property.

They undertook to write to Mr. Newton and inform him as delicately as they could of his altered circumstances and ask him when it would be convenient to give up possession of Oaklands.

As may be imagined the intelligence was a great blow to Robert Newton, and also to the Stebbing family, who at once broke off the match between him and their daughter, because they required a rich man and not a poor one.

The consequence was that Robert Newton took possession of all the money he had in the bank and betook himself to foreign parts again without announcing his intention to anybody, while Effie, feeling the pangs of disappointed love, pined away, fell into a consumption and died in the south of France.

Grace, accompanied by her father and mother, took possession of Oaklands amidst great rejoicings on the part of the tenantry, who had in days long gone by learnt to love her for her self-sacrificing behaviour and general kindness to one and all.

She was now the welcome and invited guest at all the houses in the neighbourhood, all the young men of position vying with each other to gain her hand, but she coldly rejected their advances, until people began to say that Miss Godfrey would never marry.

Twelve months passed by and still Grace remained single.

Was she waiting for some message to come from over the sea?

Alas! It came not.

Her face grew a trifle pale, and there was a care-worn, far-away look in her eyes, as if her thoughts were not in her home or with her friends.

Dr. Godfrey became alarmed at her state of health, and, thinking that change was what she required, took her to Paris, in which gay capital she had all the excitement which anyone troubled with incurable unrest could desire. Yet she was not happy, and the pallor deepened and the abstraction increased.

There was a grand ball at the Elysée, given by the president, to which the Godfreys were invited, and having quite a large circle of friends, Grace was not at a loss for partners.

Lord Somerville, an English peer, had danced twice with her, after which he begged permission to introduce a friend.

"He is a countryman of ours, Miss Godfrey," exclaimed his lordship, "though you would scarcely know it, for he is as brown as a berry. His story has quite a romance."

"Indeed? Do tell it me."

"We were at school together, and I met him quite by accident at the grand café on the Boulevard yesterday. He has only been in Paris a few days, and is on his way to England. He was engaged to a young lady who I believe gave him up because he was poor, so he went to Australia, found a nugget, and has come back rich. He is only afraid the girl is married, for he has not heard a word from her since he left the country. May I have the honour of introducing him?"

"Certainly."

Grace Godfrey's heart beat wildly, for perhaps the stranger from the antipodes could tell her something about Arthur Arundel.

His lordship went away, presently returning with a bronzed, bearded young fellow, a very Hercules in strength and size.

"Miss Godfrey, this is Mr.——" he began.

He stopped abruptly, for the young Hercules had seized Grace's hand in his, and regardless of the proprieties had raised it to his lips, covering it with kisses.

"Oh! Grace," he exclaimed, "we meet again. I am rich now, and there is no need of our separating again. I fear you misunderstood me when we parted."

"Arthur!" was all she could murmur.

It was Arthur Arundel, who was on his way home to lay his fortune and his heart at the feet of the girl he had always loved, but whom he loved too well to associate himself with when poverty stared him in the face.

She had indeed formed a totally erroneous idea of his character. His coldness was assumed for her good, and it had nearly broken his heart to act as he had done; that course, however, being dictated by a severe sense of duty, which possibly he had a little overstrained.

"I see I am de trop," exclaimed Lord Somerville. "How very strange that you two should be acquainted with one another! We shall meet again at supper—till then adieu."

He left them together, and Arthur Arundel drew her into a secluded part of the room, where, away from the dancers and out of the sound of the music, they could converse at their ease.

"Are you still free and unfettered?" asked Arthur.

"Perfectly so."

"How is it I find you here?"

"Papa brought me here for my health. I have been quite unwell."

"You have not got over the unkindness of old Brisale in not leaving you his money, but that is immaterial, I have enough for both," he replied.

He still thought her poor.

She did not undecieve him.

"Oh! Grace," he added—"my own Grace, you do not know how I have longed for this meeting!"

His voice quavered with emotion, and he was obliged to pause.

"Yes," he went on, "I have thought of you night and day. It is almost too much to think that you are free. Say you will be mine, dearest."

"Yours till death, Arthur."

"Thank you for that, my darling."

Her hand trembled in his, but there was a merry twinkle in her eyes as she said:

"We shall not be so poor after all, Arthur, for we found another will in the old oak cabinet, and Oaklands is mine. You did not know that when you said you loved me just now, so I feel that you love me for myself alone."

Arthur was surprised at this information, and really was glad that he had not known it at first.

Their hearts beat as one.

We have little more to tell, for in less than three weeks Arthur Arundel was married at the British Embassy to Grace Godfrey, and they went to Oaklands to spend the honeymoon.

It is needless to add that Arthur Arundel and his wife are the happiest couple in the county, although he sometimes regrets the stern sense of duty which compelled him to tear himself away from the girl he loved as he had done.

But that was an ugly dream of the past.

NOBLE AT LAST;

OR,

THE HEADSMAN OF ROUEN.

(AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.)

CHAPTER V.

THE HERMIT OF THE GLEN.

THE Good Father of the Black Grotto was an eccentric character who at odd intervals occupied a large cave, which he had fitted up for a habitation, in one of the wild glens peculiar to the country skirting the Norman capital to the north, and about a mile from it.

He was simply a hermit, not a priest, and no one apparently knew whence he came or how he got there.

Among the ignorant he was accounted a magician, as a matter of course. But his unpretentious wisdom and the known benevolence of his character more than counteracted the mystery surrounding him, and he had come to be sought by people of all degrees in trouble, for consolation and advice.

He was a very tall man, with bright eyes and flowing white air and beard, and was never seen in any other attire than a long, loose dress of coarse grey material.

On a certain afternoon he was sitting meditatively at the door of his cavern, when two horsemen came riding along the wild and rocky path that led to it.

The heavily slouched hats and closely-muffled chins of both indicated a desire for disguise and concealment, but no sooner had the foremost and superior horseman dismounted, and rather hesitatingly approached, than the hermit pronounced his name.

"Welcome, my Lord Viscount de Chanzy," said he, gravely. "I have been expecting you."

"My disguise avails me little then," said Bertrand, in surprise. "It seemed to answer in the city too. No one suspected my identity at the little inn where I put up, and where I readily secured a lad to guide me to the outskirts of your wild retreat, good father."

"Met you with no one at the entrance of this glen?"

"Ay, a dozen men-at-arms, or more, who seemed to guard it jealously."

"Only to prevent the unattended egress of one who now is here, however," said the hermit. "They dare not hinder anyone that would approach."

"Excellent father," said the young noble, drawing nearer; "you, who know so much, must know full well the object of my visit here. First then pray tell me—"

"The name of your unknown benefactor you would say?" interrupted the hermit, quickly. "It cannot be."

"But he has lent me money which I am ready and anxious to return to him."

"His wealth is vast and he can wait." "But I am under the gravest of obligations to him. I come of a proud race, Monsieur le Bon Père—"

"And for that reason you must learn humility," again interrupted the hermit, impassively. "Your unknown friend will reveal himself in good time—if at all. In the meantime, I am his agent. Follow me."

He arose and entered his cave. Bertrand motioned his page to remain where he was with the horses, and followed, with a rapidly beating heart, for he anticipated direct intelligence from Gabrielle.

The cave was much more spacious and extensive than an outsider would have conjectured.

The hermit led the way through a large outer grotto, which appeared to be fitted up with scantiness and severity suitable to a true anchorite's tastes, and then by a long, rough-walled passage, or tunnel, to a narrow door that closed the end of it. A dimly-burning iron lamp, suspended from the craggy roof, afforded only sufficient light to indicate the way.

The hermit touched a secret spring, which caused the door to swing noiselessly open. A charming interior was partly disclosed—an inner grotto, gorgeously tapestried and furnished, which was plentifully illuminated by the blessed sunlight itself, softly filtering in through little, close-barred loopholes at the sides.

The hermit stepped to one side of the passage, and motioned his visitor to enter.

Suspicious as well as mystified, notwithstanding the inviting interior, Bertrand could not refrain from laying his hand upon his sword as he obeyed, but an exclamation of joyful astonishment burst from him as soon as he had crossed the threshold.

Mademoiselle de Montfort herself was seated upon a divan, reading. She started up at his entrance, and her exclamation seemed but an echo of his joy as she advanced timidly to meet him, and then suffered herself to be gathered in his arms.

The door swung shut, and the anchorite was left standing alone in the passage. The glimpse that he had obtained of the lovers' meeting had wrought a frightful transformation in him. In spite of his snowy locks and beard, his eyes blazed with jealous fury, his features were distorted, and fierce tremors seemed to overpower him. He pressed his clenched hands to his temples, and seemed disposed to dash his head against the rocks.

Partly recovering himself, however, he regained the outer grotto, and began to pace its floor with feverish strides.

"Does she indeed love him, then?" he muttered, hoarsely. "Nay, it cannot be—there's madness in the thought! She cannot have yet felt real passion—she but admires the youth—regards him as her sole release from old De Coucy's arms—flies to him as to a lesser evil from a greater! Did she know more of the world? Had she seen other and superior men? Oh, I must be calm! S'death! it rends my heart to see her thus—to think of her in any arms but those—but those which never, never can unfold her! I must be brave—must suffer still; it is the expiation I have set myself!"

Strange words and thoughts, indeed, from such an anchorite, from one so venerable and benevolent of look and mien!

Yet what can fathom or circumscribe the varied emotions, contradictions, hopes, aspira-

tions, and despair of that strange instrument, the human heart?

The Good Father of the Black Grotto gradually grew calmer and more collected. At last, when a glance at a rude timepiece hanging upon the wall of his retreat apprised him that he had been pacing the floor for half an hour, he returned to the door of the inner grotto with his passive gravity of demeanour perfectly restored.

He first knocked warningly upon the door, and then touched the spring that caused it to open.

Not a tremor of emotion did his face betray, though he saw the lovers seated side by side upon the divan clasping each other's hands.

"My lord, the period permitted for your interview is expired," he said, abruptly. "Go at once and do not tarry. Mademoiselle's attendants will be at the mouth of the cave inquiring for her in five minutes. You, my lord, will quit the glen by the path to the left. One more interview will be permitted you—to-morrow at this hour—when all of your arrangements must be completed. Away!"

Bertrand arose as if to plead for a few more blissful minutes, but there was something so stern and uncompromising in the hermit's manner that he reluctantly desisted.

"Until to-morrow then, my life, my joy!" he murmured, raising the hand of his betrothed passionately to his lips.

Upon the hermit motioning him to depart, Bertrand attempted in the fulness of his gratitude to take his hand also, but the former drew himself up to his full height, and put his hands behind his back.

"It is not necessary, my lord; I am but the agent of your unknown friend, who is also mine," said he, again imperatively signing him to depart.

"Adieu, then, since I must needs obey!" cried Bertrand, throwing a last burning glance at Gabrielle as he disappeared.

Mademoiselle de Montfort remained upon the divan with her eyes cast down and the blushes suffusing her cheeks.

The Good Father of the Black Grotto had been her confidant almost from her childhood; but she was a little ashamed at his having witnessed her meeting with her lover.

"Is all arranged then, my daughter?" said the hermit, seating himself at her side with an assumption of fatherliness in his manner whose well-guarded undercurrent of passion she was far from suspecting.

"Yes, Good Father, or will be, thanks to thee!" she murmured. "Ah, how good thou art to me!"

"I would feel better deserving of thy thanks, my child," said the hermit, in guarded tones, "if I felt that this noble youth who is to rescue thee from hateful tyranny and wrong possessed thy heart as well as thy esteem."

"Doth he not so?" she cried, looking up in much surprise.

"Nay, let me ask that," exclaimed the hermit, with even more constraint. "Dost really love the young viscount?"

"Have I not every reason to? Is he not noble, brave, devoted, admirable?"

"Answer my question: dost love him?"

"He is to be my rescuer and my husband, dear Good Father; I like him better than any man I've ever met."

"My question: dost love him?"

"Not as he loves me, perhaps," said Gabrielle, at a loss to account for the intense manner and voice of her questioner. "But given as we maidens are in betrothal when but children, what do we know of love before our marriage? I suppose it all comes afterwards, does it not?"

"Not the master passion—not perfect, idolising, passionate, and holy love in all its fulness!" said the hermit, drawing a long breath of relief, and controlling his voice with more difficulty. "That in woman must precede a wedlock to endure for ever."

"Alas! such love, then, I have never known," said Gabrielle, with a little sigh, as of regret, "although I may have fancied it at times—a vaguely-imaged rapture quite beyond my com-

prehension. But then," she added, looking up brightly, "Bertrand's love for me is so apparent, so engrossing, it causes me a pleasure but to contemplate it."

"Adieu, my daughter," was the hermit's only response, as he arose and motioned her toward the door.

"Your blessing, Good Father," said Gabrielle, crossing her hands upon her breast and bending her head, which he just touched with his fingertips.

"Remember always, child, that my blessing is never sacred like a priest's," said he, coldly, "but only expressive of my humble good will. Far be it from me to arrogate a privilege which but belongs to those ordained of Heaven."

"So thou hast often said to me before, dear, Good Father," murmured the young girl, gently. "But I ever crave, even as I hope to deserve, the fond well-wishing of such wise souls as thine. Adieu."

On the following day at the same hour the lovers had another interview. Whatever of mingled raptures it may have contained, or whether of transports on one side and complacency on the other, shall be as sacredly veiled from the reader as the one of the preceding day. Suffice it to say that when the hermit again interrupted the lovers Bertrand joyfully announced that the plan of elopement had been definitely arranged.

The Baron de Coucy would arrive at the Chateau de Montfort on that same evening, accompanied by a small train, and tired out with his long journey would probably retire early to a long rest full of radiant dreams anticipative of the succeeding morn, which had been fixed upon as the time of his marriage with Gabrielle. The latter, under pretence of weariness, was likewise to seek her couch at an early hour. But at midnight she was to arise, secretly quit the castle in Celestine's company, and make the best of her way to the Black Grotto, which was less than a mile from the castle and where her lover would await her with all the means necessary for a speedy flight to Malmaison.

There they were to be married at once, after which it was their intention to seek Burgundy in disguise, where De Chanzy had no doubt that his proffered allegiance and service would be cheerfully accepted by the reigning duke.

The hermit listened to all these details without excitement, for he had himself suggested them to Mademoiselle de Montfort beforehand, as pertaining to a plan that promised the greatest success, attended by the least danger.

"It is well," was all the comment that he vouchsafed. "Depart thou first to-day, my daughter. Celestine already awaits thee at the door, to say that the attendants are more impatient of delay than usual. Linger not, and Heaven grant that all may prosper."

He touched her forehead, as was his wont, and she was about to depart when Bertrand again seized her in his arms in a farewell transport of hope and triumph.

"Begone this instant!" cried the hermit, in a strangely hoarse and choking voice, while he abruptly turned away from witnessing the embrace. "Delay a moment longer and I renounce you both!"

"One more moment for one last kiss, one last embrace!" exclaimed Bertrand, too enraptured to resent or even notice the angry, abrupt tone of the injunction. "Adieu then, beautiful, adorable Gabrielle! Adieu until to-morrow—until we meet to part no more!"

Gabrielle succeeded in breaking from his embrace, and disappeared with many blushes.

"Tarry here a little ere thou dost rejoin thy page, my lord," said the hermit, in his usual tone, as he sank into a seat.

"Excellent man, noble benefactor!" cried Bertrand, throwing himself upon one knee and seizing the hermit's hands in spite of efforts made to prevent him; "what do I not owe you? What am I not still destined to owe you? If you do, indeed, but act for another—for the mysterious benefactor whom I must never know—let me thank and bless you in his place. Ah, if you but knew—Ha! what is this? You are dis-

covered, sir, you masquerade your goodness, but in vain!"

He had caught sight of a ring—a peculiar, cross-shaped setting of blood-red stones, upon the third finger of the anchorite's left hand, which he had not perceived at their first meeting—which he now fastened his eyes upon with joyful intensity.

"The very ring that blazed upon the finger of my rescuer six weeks ago!" cried the viscount again. "Confess yourself the same, sir, who sent me first his purse, then his sword, and now the means to win the idol of my heart! You see you are discovered!"

"And what then, my lord?" coldly replied the hermit, rudely snatching his hand away and disdainfully rising. "Do you know more of me than you did before?"

"What! you will still leave me in obscurity?"

"My lord, the coast is clear, and your page awaits you," was the freezing reply.

"But my honour—my gratitude?"

"I care for neither, my lord; my service to you is an expiation."

And the young noble, more curious and more mystified than ever, had to submit to being politely but peremptorily bowed out of the cavern.

THE "WORLD'S FAIR" AT THE AGRICULTURAL HALL, LONDON.

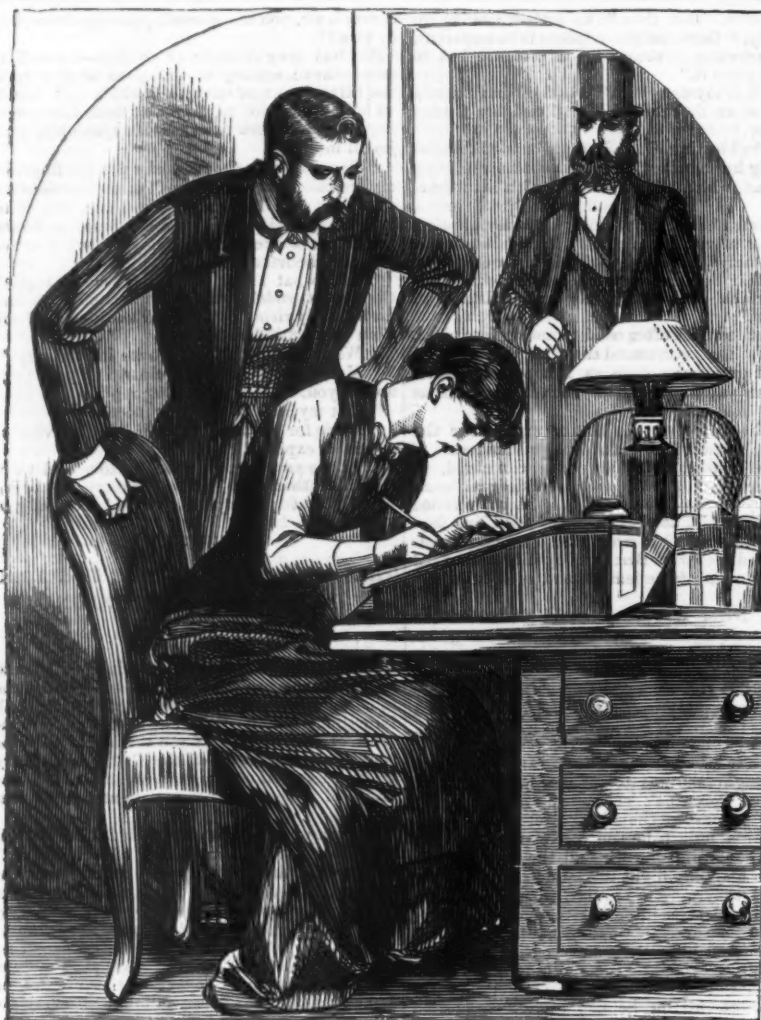
PLEASURE-SEEKERS are flocking daily and nightly in their thousands to see the "fun of the fair" now being held at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, London—long known to the inhabitants of the metropolis and to visitors from the country as the home of the Cattle and Dairy Shows, Exhibitions of various kinds, and the arena of equestrian, pedestrian, and other contests.

For six weeks, beginning with Boxing Day, it is proposed to continue this "World's Fair," where amusement of a diverse character reigns supreme. Here may be seen a real steam locomotive with several railway carriages, conveying their passengers en route through a tunnel; there a number of cutter-rigged vessels careering round, pitching and tossing with their human freight on a mimic voyage entitled "Sea on Land," while the more familiar "merry-go-round" is a never-failing source of attraction. Richardson's Show, Manley's Circus, quasi-dramatic representations, shooting galleries, swings, etc., also put in their claim for patronage.

At intervals the mild-eyed and ponderous elephant—universal favourite—laden with his easy load of eager riders, trudges up and down the spacious avenues, ever improving the occasion by as dexterous as successful appeals to his admirers with his wonderful trunk; while the patient camel, similarly equipped, somewhat haughtily performs his part as a beast of burden. Lions, tigers, a bear, and such like fearsome creatures, belonging to Wombwell's Menagerie, may also be safely viewed from the right side of strong iron bars.

Some of the stalls are prettily decorated, but conspicuous amongst them for its undoubted superiority in this respect is that of the "LONDON READER," the "largest and best" Penny Weekly Journal, the distinguishing characteristics of which—Illustrated Novels, Short Stories, Columns for the Curious, and other Useful and Entertaining FREE Literature—are tastefully displayed in the forefront of a miniature theatre, surmounted by flags, while a pretty Italian landscape forms an appropriate background to a charming tout ensemble, very creditably arranged by A. T. Mills, of Kennington Oval, London. Diminished facsimiles of the first page of the "LONDON READER," printed on card, which the attendants at this stall are busily engaged in gratuitously dispensing, seem to be in high favour with the numerous visitors.

Under its present aspect the Hall, especially when lighted up in the evening, presents a very lively scene, and is evidently very popular.



[A SURPRISE.]

A FATEFUL ADVERTISEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

"Young ladies wanted to fill the posts of invoice clerk, book-keeper, forwarding clerk, and corresponding clerk in a corn merchant's office, in which there is also a vacancy for an apprentice. None but those possessing unexceptionable references need apply."

"I think that will do, Brother Joseph, I think that will do, eh?"

"Do! Of course it will do; the very thing, Henry. The idea is a capital one; what made you think of carrying it out?"

"I thought," remarked the senior partner of Middleton Brothers, corn merchants, Liverpool, gracefully dividing his coat-tails, and leaning his back against the mantelpiece in the private office—"I thought," he repeated, sustaining the coat-tails with one hand, and gently waving the other, "that we should establish a new era; that we should emancipate woman from her galling thralldom; that our names should be handed down through succeeding ages as world-wide benefactors, and that we should considerably lessen our expenses, Brother Joseph."

"There is something in that, Henry; there is decidedly something in that."

"Something in it! There is everything in it. Business, my dear Joseph, especially in times like these, is business."

Joseph murmured assent, drew his chair nearer the fire, took a pinch of snuff, and became lost in meditation.

"Mr. Johnson!" cried Henry, opening the door.

A tall young man, with dark hair, dark eyes, and a black moustache, appeared in answer to the summons.

"I wish you to make out three or four copies of this advertisement, and send them to the principal papers in time for insertion in to-morrow's issue."

"Yes, sir. I'll see to it at once."

Mr. Johnson closed the door carefully behind him, proceeded to his desk, sat down, and prepared to resume his perusal of that morning's newspaper; but happening to glance at the slip of paper he had received, he caught sight of the first few words, and became almost petrified with amazement.

"Why, what in the name of all that's wonderful! Why, good gracious! Jack, I say, Jack, here's about the queerest, rummiest start you ever heard of in your born days."

"What's up?" inquired an individual in another part of the office—a prepossessing individual, with curling brown hair, close-clipped beard, straight nose, and blue eyes.

"What's up? Why, look here."

"Well, this is a go," remarked Jack. "He must be getting softening of the brain. By Jove, though, it'll be rather the touch if it comes to anything."

And such infinite delight filled the souls of

these young men that they were forced to retire outside in order to give vent to their feelings.

The advertisement was read next morning by the brothers in their daily paper.

"I scarcely think," said Henry, as they walked down to the office, "I scarcely think we shall have many applications, Joseph. I believe the careful wording of the advertisement will deter unsuitable persons from applying. Our visitors, I fancy, will be few, but select."

Joseph meekly assented. He always did to his brother's propositions—always had done since the days of his infancy.

"Few, but select!" Oh, wise prognostications of men, how utterly ye come to naught! "Few, but select!"

If from ninety to one hundred applications in a day are few, if a company composed in a very large degree of ex-barmaids, ex-ballet-girls, ex-shop-assistants, ex-waitresses, may be called select, then Henry Middleton's prophecy was verified—but certainly not unless.

All day long the stream poured in. All day long the steps outside were crowded with applicants, the pavement lined with spectators. Office-boys clung to the banisters and shouted sarcastic encouragement to the ingoers, and yelled derisively at the outgoers. Business for the time was at a stand-still.

The day remained a day of dread in the memory of Middleton Brothers.

After many hours of intolerable discomfort, after being sneered at, scolded at, preached at, after being appealed to with tears and denounced with scorn, they succeeded in securing four bonafide young ladies and a respectable person of forty.

The "respectable person" was installed as bookkeeper; the invoice clerk was a slim little creature, with bright grey eyes and rippling auburn hair; the forwarding clerk was dark and tall, with large brown eyes; the corresponding clerk was short and fair, with a round, kindly, good-natured face; the apprentice was a saucy little mite of fifteen.

I have said that it ever remained a day of dread in the memory of Middleton Brothers. To say so is to express the facts of the case in the mildest possible manner.

That day haunted them. They brooded over it when awake, they dreamed of it when asleep. Often they would wake up in a cold perspiration believing themselves pursued over interminable deserts by troops of loud-voiced, umbrella-armed females. They were laughed at by their friends, they were jeered at by their enemies.

Such, alas, is the fate of all leaders in the van of civilisation and philanthropy.

But these latter evils were in prospective, and the quiet and seclusion, after the noise and bustle and ruthless invasion of their privacy, brought a sense of comfort to their hearts that shut out a view of all future disagreeables.

Henry stood with his back against the mantelpiece; Joseph sat by the fire. Henry spoke; Joseph listened.

"You see, Joseph," said the former, holding up a piece of paper on which he had been making calculations, and gathering up his coat-tails with the unoccupied hand, an action which from constant repetition during a quarter of a century had grown mechanical, "you see that by this arrangement we cut down our expenses very considerably, and shall be able at the end of the year to make a pleasant addition to our banker's balance."

Joseph smiled pensively; the prospect was not unpleasing.

"We paid our last bookkeeper," continued Henry, "two hundred pounds, Joseph, two hundred pounds! Miss Smith is pleased to undertake the duties for ninety, without any immediate prospect of a rise—gain, one hundred and ten pounds. We paid our invoice clerk one hundred pounds; Miss Vernon accepts the position for fifty—gain, fifty pounds. Our forwarding clerk received one hundred and fifty pounds; Miss Warwick is content with eighty—gain, seventy pounds. Our corresponding clerk received one hundred and thirty pounds; Miss

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Lawson is quite satisfied with seventy—gain, sixty pounds. We gave our last apprentice one hundred pounds for five years; we give our present one, Miss Ramsay, eighty—gain, twenty pounds. Making a gain in all of three hundred and ten pounds, which is not exactly to be despised, and may come in handy for one or two little things—eh, Joseph?"

And Henry chuckled, actually chuckled, which was a rare thing with the senior partner of Middleton Brothers.

"I expect the work will be done in just as businesslike a manner—perhaps, if anything, more methodically, more neatly. Women, you see, Joseph, possess finer sensibilities than men, pay more attention to detail, and are more amenable to direction and authority; women don't smoke or drink—at least the majority don't, and they come very much cheaper, Joseph, very much cheaper."

Joseph smiled acquiescence. He was acquiescence itself. His poking of the fire was an affirmative; the way he sat seemed a respectful assent; the very blowing of his nose appeared to express complete deference to his brother's opinion, and entire coincidence with it.

"I have no positive complaint to make against either Mr. Johnson or Mr. Harley, but at the same time I should not be sorry if they had left with the others. It was a most remarkable and most fortunate thing that we got so many of our hands at once. But the work must be sadly behind. I think we shall have to stay late for a few nights and see that it is got up."

They did not, however, stay late that night. The labours they had undergone during the day would have prostrated a Samson, and they were wearied out.

When they entered the office next morning a transformation had taken place that amazed them.

The air, so long a sea of dust in which sickly bluebottles and sticky flies swam feebly about, was now filled with fragrant perfumes.

The hat rails were now for the most part occupied by dainty hats and flowing feathers, by graceful cloaks and coquettish little veils.

The stand beneath, so lately filled with ponderous rain-protectors, now held a row of tiny umbrellas, looking like grown-up parasols. And—greatest innovation of all—on one of the long desks, upon which thousands of pounds had been counted, scores of ledgers balanced, stood a glassful of flowers.

The whole place seemed changed. There was the soft rustle of women's dresses, the soft murmur of women's voices.

The brothers stood and gazed not altogether coldly on the wonderful transformation, and as they gazed their eyes rested unknowingly on the same spot.

Near the window, in a patch of sunlight—it was a bright spring day—sat the lately-engaged invoice clerk. The sunbeams fell lovingly on the small head, and the brown hair seemed to ripple joyously, as if glad that in its folds there lurked tinges of colour that could claim kindred with the golden sunlight.

There was such a quaint air of preoccupation in the serious little face, such a pursing up of the red lips, such a wrinkling of the smooth brow, such a busy turning over of mighty leaves, such a swift movement of the diligent pen, and at intervals such a wistful contemplation of a cruel ink-spot on one of the tiny white hands, that Henry Middleton, the stern senior partner of Middleton Brothers, smiled, and the rugged face beneath the influence of the smile became a pleasant thing to look upon.

Turning round he beheld Joseph smiling too.

He put his hand kindly on his brother's shoulder, and they walked musingly into the private office, with who shall say what memories of a time when business was not all in all and life was pleasant.

But after a quarter of an hour's perusal of the pile of business letters that lay awaiting the partners the wrinkles came back deeper than before, the smiles faded away—Middleton Brothers were corn merchants once more.

From the letters Henry passed to a formidable

list of names and figures headed "Accounts Due," and kept always by this detail-loving man in the recesses of his private desk. Copying a few of the names on a slip of paper, he turned to his brother, and broke the silence for the first time.

"Would you just step into the office, Joseph, and see if there is anyone not particularly engaged? I want a few accounts collected."

Joseph complied, and after a few minutes' absence returned.

"Miss Warwick is the only one at liberty. I have told her to get ready and come in to you."

Ten minutes passed, a quarter of an hour passed, and then Miss Warwick appeared.

Oh, stern business men, to whom business is business and all else vanity and vexation of spirit, can you possibly imagine a clerk with a muff, a clerk with a veil, a dainty cloak, dainty shoes, and a daintier hat and feather?

Henry had fretted at the delay, but before this apparition, with its laughing eyes and dimpled cheeks, the rebuke died away on his lips.

He rose, took up the slip of paper, got into his accustomed attitude by the fireplace, and spoke as follows:

"I have here the names of a few firms against which there are several outstanding accounts. Now I wish you to call upon them and press for immediate settlement. We make it a rule never to allow accounts to become overdue without repeated application for them. We have learned the necessity of this from experience. We have known many instances in which a little promptitude and a little pressing have saved us from very serious losses. When you have been with us longer, Miss Warwick, you will find that we are, above all things, methodical; that we attend personally to little details which are generally left entirely to subordinates. We do so because we have some little respect for our reputation, some little objection to throwing away our own and other people's money, which cannot be said of all Liverpool corn firms."

Henry Middleton sat down with a grim smile on his face, and Miss Warwick bowed and retreated.

A little later on he entered the outer office and inquired for Mr. Harley. Mr. Harley had gone out. Where to? Mr. Harley had gone to show Miss Warwick the places at which she had to call. Miss Warwick had the addresses; was not that sufficient? Mr. Harley thought she would not know the directions in which they lay. Hum!

Might it be asked why Mr. Johnson had not got the cash ready for the bank?

Mr. Johnson had been showing Miss Vernon the exact manner in which Mr. Middleton liked the invoices to be made out. Ha!

"It seems to me, Joseph," remarked Henry, re-entering the private office, "that along with the unquestionable advantages of our scheme there may be—I only say there may be—some trifling drawbacks."

Henry Middleton proved to be right in his conjecture. There were drawbacks.

For instance, it was singular, and a little inconvenient, that neighbouring firms became absurdly anxious about the prompt forwarding and receiving of invoices; that junior clerks came flitting in two or three times a day, cagerly inquiring if such and such an invoice were ready, or bringing invoices for goods bought a few hours before.

Miss Vernon was engaged in expostulating with these young persons half the day; and, really, the difficulty she had to make them comprehend her, and to get them to go away, was something overwhelming.

It was singular, too, that forwarding clerks in all the neighbouring offices became strangely modest and self-distrustful, and were perpetually dropping in to make inquiries as to certain stations and railways, the particulars regarding which appeared in the most inexplicable manner to have escaped their memories.

Miss Warwick might have been specially engaged to give them information. There seemed to be more young men in the world than

there used to be, as Joseph remarked to his brother; and, decidedly, they appeared to be growing very plentiful.

There were always several in the outer office at all hours, there were always two or three ascending the stairs when the brothers went out, always a number on the pavement, and always a glimpse of coat-tails vanishing through the doorway if Joseph or Henry turned at the top of the street to favour the promenaders with a second glance.

The brothers at first grew puzzled, then a little angry.

From the multitude of callers, from the noise and bustle, business might have been exceedingly brisk, and yet the day-book showed no perceptible increase in the number of sales, and the work was steadily falling behind.

Oppressed with these considerations, Henry the wise delivered himself thus unto Joseph the meek:

"I can't say that I am exactly disappointed with the result of our scheme, but, at the same time, I must confess that it has, so far, scarcely realised my expectations."

"Things have not gone on exactly as I expected. Some of my ideas have been confirmed and in some I fear I have been mistaken. I have lately bestowed the most minute observation upon the work, the manner of work, and the amount of work done by the ladies and gentlemen we employ, and have come to the conclusion that, provided they had both received the same training—that is, the same description of training, and occupied the same length of time over it—there would be no very essential difference between the work done by the two sexes. But, of course, we, as practical men of business, have to do with what is, not with what, under other circumstances, might have been. And the fact remains that they have not received the same training, and that considerable difference does exist."

"For instance, I find that the ladies in our office are more liable than our male clerks to do their work by fits and starts, and are certainly not as capable of continued unrelaxed mental application to business. This may partially arise from physical inequality, or it is possible that we have in our employ exceptions to the general rule. But such I have certainly found to be the case. Again, the former are certainly the less exact of the two. I had really some considerable difficulty in impressing upon them the vital importance of every figure, in every book, being proved to be undeniably and undoubtedly correct. I certainly am unable to find that the attention to detail, with which some persons, generally of their own sex, are so ready to credit them, is carried to any great extent into business life. On the other hand, I find my opinion that they are more amenable to direction and authority confirmed. Indeed I find it hard, almost impossible, to rebuke them. They are so humble and so penitent."

And so pretty did you add, Henry? Assuredly the thought entered your mind if it rose not to your lips. Ah, Henry, Henry, have three-score years and a bitter world-fight not yet destroyed thy youthful inability to look sternly on a beautiful face?

"There is, at least, one good point about them, and that is that they are not so eager to get home at night. I suppose the fact arises from their having no particular hobbies, no cricket or foot-ball or athletics. They are down rather earlier in the morning, and take no longer over their luncheon, except the time wasted in getting ready to go out, which is, of course, ridiculous. On the whole, as far as personal intercourse is concerned, they are much pleasanter to deal with, being quicker and brighter in many ways. The other drawbacks connected with them cannot, I suppose, be laid to their charge, and are no doubt unavoidable. Well, well, Joseph, we must take the good and bad together, and perhaps the balance will after all be in our favour. Three hundred and ten pounds are not to be despised, and a little training may make them all that we could desire."

CHAPTER II.

The winter nights were drawing swiftly in, and it became necessary to light the gas long before the offices closed.

Now it was a singular thing that there existed a strange reluctance in the office of Middleton Brothers to comply with this necessity.

Matches became mysteriously scarce, and a capacity for working in comparative darkness developed itself with surprising swiftness.

This, along with many other little annoyances, some of which have been previously mentioned, chafed the soul of Henry Middleton almost beyond endurance.

He became like a simmering volcano; an eruption might at any moment be expected. For a long time he remained in the simmering state, but at length the eruption came.

Quietly ascending the stairs one dusky evening he entered the office. The gas was unlit, and, pausing in the shadow of the door, he beheld by the dim light a strange scene.

Miss Vernon and Mr. Johnson were standing by the window close together—very close together—gazing out on the crescent moon that was slowly surmounting the house-tops.

Miss Warwick was bending over a desk in the shadiest corner of the room, and Mr. Harley was bending over her, talking in a low voice. Miss Smith was holding forth volubly to the warehouseman, and Miss Ramsay was waltzing over the floor with the office-boy.

A moment's amazed contemplation of the scene, and then sharp and stern rang out the voice of the senior partner:

"Mr. Johnson!"

The person addressed looked round with a start that would have "brought down the house" in a melodrama.

"Yes, sir."

"May I ask what is the meaning of all this, and why you are not getting through with your work?"

"I have been checking a calculation of Miss Vernon's, sir."

"It's a singular thing," said Mr. Middleton, with a grim smile, "it's a singular thing that, in the space of a few months, you should all become pervaded with such a spirit of unselfishness. It seems to me that each of you is always doing somebody else's work, and never attending to his or her own. Now, I have a great respect for such a spirit in the abstract, or in domestic or social life, but it doesn't do in business, ladies and gentlemen, it doesn't do in business; and I must distinctly state that I can no longer allow things to go on as they have been doing. I place the matter before you as it appears from a plain business point of view. You come to me engaging to do certain work, and for the doing of that work I agree to give you a certain amount of remuneration. Now, if instead of doing work for which you are especially engaged, you are continually dabbling in other people's, you break your part of the engagement, and cannot, with any show of reason, expect me to keep mine, or retain you any longer in my employ. Please understand, therefore, that unless you are prepared to adhere to the terms of the agreement made between us when I engaged you, I must look about for those who are willing to do so."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Middleton stalked into the private office, leaving Mr. Harley stealing guiltily to his own desk; Miss Vernon checking invoices; Mr. Johnson balancing the cash; Miss Warwick looking over shipping-notes; Miss Smith writing headings in the ledger; the warehouseman gazing thoughtfully into the fire; Miss Ramsay addressing circulars; and the office-boy looking for matches.

When he entered the private office Joseph was dictating a letter to the corresponding clerk. But Joseph had no need to stand so close to her, no need to rest his hand on the back of her chair, and almost speak the words in her ear. Really, Joseph was becoming foolish in his old age. At forty-eight he should be growing more dignified, more conscious of the high position occupied by a partner in Middleton Brothers.

Certainly he looked foolish enough, and far from dignified, when he caught sight of his brother, and little Miss Lawson looked rather foolish too.

Henry sat down in stern silence, and presently Miss Lawson left the room.

Then Joseph, like all quiet, shy people when labouring under embarrassment, could not be silent, and began to pester his brother with all kinds of irrelevant questions and remarks. He received the shortest of replies, and at length Henry looked up and remarked:

"Did you ever read the legend of St. Anthony's Temptations, Joseph?"

"I—I—fancy I have, Henry; but it is so long since that I almost forget it."

"I should advise you to refresh your memory," returned his brother, dryly; and the conversation dropped.

Presently at the door there came a timid knock, and on a summons to enter being given Miss Vernon stepped shyly in.

As she came forward it was noticeable that a certain sprightliness and sparrow-like sauciness that generally distinguished her had almost completely disappeared, and there was a flush on her cheeks, and a light in her eyes, that could surely have little to do with invoices.

She stood by the table with downcast head, folding, unfolding, and refolding a scrap of paper that lay before her, but seemingly unable to speak.

Henry had been thoroughly vexed and annoyed, but as he looked at the shy, timid girl he felt again the consciousness of his utter inability to be angry with her personally.

"What is it, Miss Vernon?"

"I came to—to give you notice, sir."

"Notice! Why, bless my soul and body, what for? Surely you are not so sensitive as to be offended by a rebuke which you cannot deny was thoroughly well merited?"

"Oh, no; I assure you it has nothing to do with that, sir; but I'm—I'm engaged."

That word had only one meaning for Henry Middleton; all other associations connected with it had faded away many a weary year ago.

"By what firm, may I ask?"

Miss Vernon grew confused.

"By Mr. Johnson, sir."

"Mr. Johnson. Is he setting up in business?"

"Oh, no, sir—only in a house."

"I see," said Henry, grimly, and thereupon ensued a long pause.

A pause during which the little scrap of paper became the centre of a series of circles traced by a small, unsteady finger, during which the red lips seemed unable to keep quite still, and bright eyes became clouded, and one hand made diligent search in a pocket.

These signs were too ominous to be disregarded, and Henry rose in great consternation.

"My dear Miss Vernon," he said, placing his hand on her shoulder in quite a fatherly way, "I'm a rough old business man, and I look at all matters from a business point of view, perhaps from a selfish point of view; and looked at in that way, you know, this engagement of yours seems what one might call a somewhat unbusiness-like proceeding; but, at the same time, from what I have seen of you both, I believe you will get on exceedingly well together, and I am sure I wish you all possible joy and happiness."

And Mr. Middleton shook hands with her, and conducted her to the door, and opened it for her, and was rewarded with a grateful, tear-bedimmed smile that quite melted him.

A little sympathy is indispensable to women, and goes a long way with them.

"Beaten at all points," muttered Henry, going back to his desk. "It's a strange thing, a strange thing."

What is strange, Henry? Strange that you should still have a little fellow-feeling with youthful joy and youthful love? Surely not.

For perhaps the first time in his life he felt actually guilty in the presence of his meek brother; but, giving a stealthy glance to discover in what manner the other's self-exaltation

would display itself, he beheld that worthy gentleman vigorously blowing his nose, with his head turned to the opposite direction. A long silence reigned, only broken by the scraping of the brothers' pens.

Then another knock. This time the incomer was Miss Smith.

She advanced briskly, she stood about two yards off the table with half-folded arms. She wore mittens. She was eminently respectable. Mr. Middleton looked up coldly. Miss Vernon and Miss Smith were not twin-sisters.

"Well?"

"I came, sir, under the impression that this was the day of the month on which you engaged me."

"Well?"

"I trust that my work has hitherto given you satisfaction, sir?"

Mr. Middleton bowed.

"I have always striven, I am sure, to do my work to the best of my powers, as far as in me lay. There have been drawbacks, sir, as have kept me from doing things in the exact way I should have liked, but my habit is not to deceive anyone, sir,"—as Miss Smith became more emphatic her h's got decidedly the upper hand of her—"and, therefore, I should like to say that what I have done I have strove to do well, and trust I have done so. I—"

"Miss Smith, I am exceedingly busy, if you would come to the point at once I should be obliged. Do you want a rise?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"Then will you have the goodness to state what you do want?"

"I wish to give notice, sir."

"Indeed. May I inquire your reason for doing so?"

"I am about to be married, sir."

"Married?" echoed Henry, with a dangerous amount of surprise in his tone.

"Yes, married, sir. To Mr. Gudgeon, sir, the warehouseman."

"I should have thought Gudgeon had more sense," he was about to add "sense," but checked himself in time. Indeed, Miss Smith wore a look that might have inspired discretion in the boldest of men. "That is to say, I am glad to hear it, Miss Smith, and beg to congratulate you."

The words were accompanied by a glance at the door that could not be mistaken, and Miss Smith beat a retreat.

Shortly after Mr. Middleton stepped into the outer office, returning in a few minutes looking utterly confounded.

He dropped into a chair and sat for a time without speaking.

At length he rose and stood by the mantelpiece, though so thoroughly put out that the usual manipulation of his coat-tails was entirely omitted.

"You will be surprised to hear, Brother Joseph, that in addition to Miss Vernon and Miss Smith, Miss Warwick and Miss Ramsay have just now given me notice. The former is engaged to Mr. Harley, and the latter, who is to be her bridesmaid, declares her utter inability to exist in the office made desolate by the absence of her dearest friend. She, Miss Ramsay, besought me with tears in her eyes to release her, and as the young lady has spent the principal part of her time in teaching the office-boy to waltz I was only too willing to do so. We are now by a singular train of circumstances in much the same position as we were five months ago. The question, therefore, is, what are we to do? It seems to me that engaging female clerks is only an indirect way of procuring wives for all the young gentlemen in the neighbourhood. If things went on as they have been doing we should have to abandon the corn trade and form ourselves into a Wife Supplying Association, Limited. In sober earnestness, Joseph, I am thoroughly disgusted with the whole affair. We have had nothing but trouble and worry since the beginning of this new system, and I at any rate shall be only too glad to get back to the old one. I wouldn't go through all we did the first day our advertisement appeared for a thousand pounds, let alone

three hundred. And then, as I said before, we have had so much trouble and worry and things have been so unsatisfactory that I am afraid we must allow that our scheme, up to the present at least, has proved little better than a failure. Indeed, from almost the very first I have had grave misgivings, and now I must allow that the whole affair appears to me to have been a most unbusiness-like proceeding."

Henry paused, and Joseph murmured assent.

Henry continued:

"With one exception we shall get rid of all our female clerks by the end of next month."

Joseph looked guilty.

"Now, I propose that we fill their places with properly-trained men. The way in which the work and our commercial reputation have suffered more than counterbalances the difference in salaries. We must try in some courteous manner to induce the lady who still remains to leave us. She seems good-natured and willing, but I am afraid she is the least capable of any of them."

For the first time for many years there rose into Joseph's simple face a quick flush of anger; and when he spoke there was a touch of his brother's sharpness in the tones of his voice.

"Do you mean Miss Lawson, Henry?"

His brother looked surprised—something like a game-cock assaulted by a month-old chicken. "Certainly, I do."

The flush faded away, the sharpness died out of the voice, the guilty look came back, and Joseph trembled.

"I wished to say, Henry, if you meant Miss Lawson, that I am—I mean that she is—that is, that we are—"

"Are what, Brother Joseph?"

"Engaged, Henry."

Henry gazed at him for a moment in mute amazement, then stepped across the room, leaned his hands on the table, and inquired slowly and impressively, the while "fixing him with his glittering eye:"

"Do you mean to tell me that you are actually engaged to Miss Lawson?"

"Yes, Henry."

Henry turned round without a word, and paced restlessly up and down. The news came upon him with an absolute shock. Women, at least until the conception of his unlucky scheme, had long been to him a kind of abstraction, existing, no doubt, in a far-off sort of way, but having little or nothing to do with practical life except as servants or housekeepers.

And, even, when he had carried his scheme into force, he looked on them only as clerks, and nothing more than clerks—in other words, as a description of machine hired at so much per annum. But that they were full of passionate life, and capable of feeling and arousing passionate love, and that such an unbusiness-like thing as love should actually interfere with the making of money and the routine of office work, had never entered into his calculations—in fact, seemed to him absurd, monstrous, a breaking of all faith, a desecration of all sacred precedent.

And yet, as he himself expressed it, he had been "beaten at all points;" had been unable even to rebuke them, and utterly powerless to stop the introduction of this last undreamed-of element.

Its influence upon those in the outer office had been bad enough to bear; but, now that it had stormed his last stronghold, he felt completely overwhelmed. It was, indeed, "the unkindest cut of all."

Well might he have addressed his brother in the words of despairing Cæsar: "And thou, too, oh, Brutus!"

Henry, however, was not at all theatrical; and when he stopped and faced the culprit he simply remarked, with considerable emphasis:

"Well, I never thought you could be such a consummate idiot, Joseph;" and thereupon sat down and began to write.

Joseph, the guilty, the meek, the erring one, cast wistful glances at his brother's face during a lengthy and painful silence, longing yet fearing to speak. At last he faltered:

"I trust you have no overpowering objection, Henry."

Henry, in the meantime, had considerably cooled down. Perhaps some flickering memories of almost forgotten feeling; perhaps the faint remembrance of loving eyes long since dim, or the clasp of a little hand long since dust and ashes, or some touch of real sympathy with his simple, patient brother, had softened him; or the fleeting revelation of something higher, something beyond the gathering in of the root of all evil, had flashed across his mind. When he spoke his tone was gentler.

"I don't say, Joseph, that I have any overpowering objection, though if I had it is now too late to gain anything by expressing it. You have taken this step entirely on your own responsibility, and, of course, have judged for yourself as to its wisdom; but if you ask for my candid opinion, I must tell you that it undoubtedly appears to me a most—a most—he sought for another phrase in vain, it sprang to his lips and refused to be set aside—"a most unbusiness-like proceeding."

A COQUETTE.

SHE rambled through the meadows wide
So richly gemmed with dew;
Her hair was bright as golden light,
Her eyes were azure blue.
And shyly, there, the farmer lad
Betrayed his love and woe;
She passed him by
With head held high,
And coldly answered, "No!"

SHE wandered to the woodland pool,
By wild flowers all begirt;
She saw her beauty in its depth,
And smiled—the pretty flirt!
And there the curate told his love,
Though hope was almost dead;
But though she sighed,
She naught replied,
She only shook her head.

SHE lingered by the broad park gate,
The old lord lingered too;
He sought the maiden for his bride,
And knew, too, how to woo.
And though he feigned love's sad despair,
Her answer he could guess;
But could not spy
Her triumph high—
She smiled, and whispered, "Yes!"

STATISTICS.

BEAM and Wagner, in their sixth issue of the "Population of the Earth," which has just appeared, estimate the total population at 1,455,923,450. Two years ago the estimate was about 1,430,000,000. Europe is assigned 315,939,000 inhabitants; Asia, 834,707,000; Africa, 205,679,000; Australia and Polynesia, 3,041,300; the Polar regions, 82,000; the United States, 48,000,000.

THE receipts on account of revenue from the 1st April, 1880, when there was a balance of £3,273,428, to December 11, 1880, were £51,919,133, against £50,989,519 in the corresponding period of the preceding financial year, which began with a balance of £6,915,756. The net expenditure was £53,738,429, against £55,880,282 to the same date in the previous year. The Treasury balances on December 11 amounted to £4,908,029, and at the same date in 1879 to £1,715,089.

THE GERMAN NAVY.—The Imperial Marine List for 1881 has just been published, with returns up to November 1, from which it appears that the German navy now includes 7 ironclad frigates, 5 ironclad corvettes, 11 covered corvettes, 5 so-called flat deck corvettes, and 4 more

in course of construction, 9 gunboats, with a variety of vessels for coast defence, despatch boats, transports, training ships, tugs, pilot boats, &c.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PIE-CRUST.—One-quarter pound butter, one-half pound lard, one pound flour, enough ice-water to get it into paste; roll in all the butter by spreading.

BANNOCKS (OATMEAL).—Put a handful of Scotch oatmeal in a basin with a little butter, or clarified dripping, and a pinch of salt; mix it into a paste with a little cold water, beat and knead it well, then roll it out to one-eighth of an inch; bake on a griddle over a bright fire on both sides until browned and quite crisp.

FIG PUDDING.—Chop half a pound of figs very finely, mix them with a quarter of a pound of coarse sugar, a tablespoonful of treacle for a tablespoonful of milk, half a pound of flour, a quarter of a pound of suet, an egg and a pinch of grated nutmeg. Put the pudding into a buttered mould, and boil for four or five hours.

MINCE-MEAT.—Four common bowls of beef chopped fine, eight of apples, also chopped fine, five pounds of raisins, five of currants, two of citron, three and a half pounds of sugar, one quart of brandy, three of cider, one-half ounce of cinnamon, the same of cloves and mace or nutmegs.

MISCELLANEOUS.

JAPANESE ladies paint their cheeks with a green substance, which, on exposure to the air, soon becomes of a delicate pink.

To Lord Beaconsfield's respect for Mr. Cowen's unflinching patriotism may be attributed the fact that an elaborately bound copy of "Endymion" has been sent to Mr. Cowen, with the autograph of presentation from the distinguished author.

WONDERS do not pall. The latest wonder is more astonishing than a photophone. The Pope is going to make a Turk a cardinal. Monsignore Hassan, born of Turkish parents in the ancient capital of the Greek Church, and the ancient capital of Mahometanism, to wit Constantinople, was educated at Rome, became a priest there, went to labour among his own people, was made a Monsignore, and is now about to be given the purple robe of a Prince of the Church. He will be the first Turk who ever wore the scarlet hat of Rome.

THE monks of St. Gothard, although not included in the expulsion of the Order from France, have found themselves compelled to abandon their monastery, in consequence of the giving way of the foundations, undermined by the piercing of the railway tunnel underneath. The monastery is very ancient—built five centuries ago—and has been the means of saving the lives of many a woe-begone traveller in its time. The necessity of leaving it just at this moment is regarded with superstitious awe by the poor monks.

JAPANESE ROOMS.—Miss Isabella Bird, in a book on Japan, says the rooms of the houses are not encumbered by ornament; a single kakemono, or fine piece of lacquer or china, appears for a few days, and then makes way for something else, so they have variety as well as simplicity, and each object is enjoyed in its turn without distraction. The art of arranging flowers is taught in manuals, the study of which forms part of a girl's education. The only vestige of religion in the house is the kamidana or god-shelf, on which stands a wooden shrine like a shintô temple, which contains the memorial tablets to deceased relations. Each morning a sprig of evergreen and a little rice and saké (Japanese whisky) are placed before it, and every evening a lighted lamp.

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[WHITAKER'S ALMANACK FOR 1881 (J. Whitaker, 12, Warwick Lane, Paternoster Row, London) is a marvel of useful compilation. It is not too much to say that there is instruction in it for everybody. And yet we are promised by the Editor still further additions in next year's issue. No one who can afford a shilling should be without it.]

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

OUR CORRESPONDENTS are informed that no charge is made under any circumstances for advertisements appearing on this page.

ENQUIRE.—The first quotation is from Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," and reads as follows:

"It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant voice till noon—
A noise like a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune."

The other is from Longfellow's "The Day is Done," and reads:

"And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away."

FANNY.—If the gentleman is an intimate friend there can be no harm in your exchanging photographs with him.

EMMA R.—It is always better to return presents when an engagement is broken off; it is well to feel under no obligation.

M. O.—The name Gerald means "king of men;" Ethel, "noble;" Ellen, "fruitful;" Alice, "a princess;" Dorothy, "the gift of God."

A. W.—Apply to a dramatic or operatic agent, who would probably test your powers and give an opinion upon your probable chances of success.

J. J. N.—No stamp is required.

A POOR GARDENER.—The mother's consent would be necessary. You would have to make certain declarations previous to the licence being granted, which if false would subject you to penalties.

SNOWDROP.—Handwriting good; colour of hair a pretty light brown.

A LONG SUBSCRIBER.—The fact that the children were taken away and temporarily maintained out of presumably charitable motives does not relieve the father from his responsibilities concerning them.

M. A. K.—The rainbow is caused by the refraction of the sun's rays by the falling rain, and it can only be seen when the sun is on one side of us and the rain on the other. Rainbows are generally seen in the afternoon, when the sun is approaching the western horizon, and rain-clouds come up from the west and clear up by passing on to the east. The reason we never see rainbows in the middle of the day is because the sun is above us, and we cannot stand between it and the rain.

J. E. R.—How to make copying black and red inks: 1. Bruised Aleppo nutgalls, 2 lb.; water, 1 gallon; boil in a copper vessel for an hour, adding water to make up for that lost by evaporation; strain and again boil the galls with a gallon of water and strain; mix the liquors, and add immediately 10 oz. of copperas in coarse powder and 8 oz. of gum arabic; agitate until solution of these latter is effected, add a few drops of solution of potassium permanganate, strain through a piece of hair cloth, and after permitting to settle, bottle. The addition of a little extract of logwood will render the ink blacker when first written with. Half an ounce of sugar to the gallon will render it a good copying ink. 2. Shellac 4 oz.; borax, 3 oz.; water, 1 quart; boil till dissolved, and add 2 oz. of gum arabic dissolved in a little hot water; boil and add enough of a well-triturated mixture of equal parts indigo and lampblack to produce the proper colour; after standing several hours draw off and bottle. 3. Half a drachm of powdered drop lake and 18 grains of powdered gum arabic dissolved in 3 oz. of ammonia water constitute one of the finest red or carmine inks.

R. I. and P. E., two mechanics, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. R. I. is twenty-three, medium height, fair. P. E. is twenty-one, medium height, dark.

LAUREL and MAY, two friends, would like to correspond with two seamen in the Royal Navy with a view to matrimony. Laurel is eighteen, medium height, dark hair, good-looking, fond of music. May is seventeen, medium height, fair, dark hair and eyes. Respondents must be twenty or twenty-two, tall, dark.

IRENE and ADA, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Irene is twenty, tall, fair, loving. Ada is twenty-one, medium height, dark, fond of home.

SISSEY, LITTLEME and DOT, three friends, would like to correspond with three young gentlemen. Sissey is twenty, medium height, dark hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of home. Littleme is nineteen, medium height, fair hair, blue eyes, fond of music and singing. Dot is seventeen, medium height, fair hair, grey eyes, of a loving disposition.

NELLIE and KATIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Nellie is twenty-three, tall, fair, grey eyes. Katie is twenty-three, tall, fair, grey eyes.

"REMEMBER!"

"Remember me," you said, when buds were peeping,
And I from thee was forced to wander far.
And I replied: "While Love's tryals I'm keeping
With Fate at springtide, shall thy face, my Star,
Smile on my course, through distant regions sweep-
ing,
Though foreign faces round me smiling are."
Thus fulsome answer to thy pure words giving,
I passed from thee, my slumberous summer living,
With love for thee at heart; and then
The clouds, the noise, the clash of men,
Made me forget my Star.

"Remember me," you said, when flowers were blowing,
And I replied, my wanderings still not done:
"While heaven and earth still hand in hand are going,
Through pomp of summer, shall thy face, my Sun,
Light my swift way, though dark and darker grow-
ing,
And my blind gropings reach no friendly one."
Thus verbiage still to thy sweet tenderness giving,
I passed from thee, my slumberous summer living,
With love for thee at heart; and then
The blaze, the bloom, the smile of men,
Made me forget my Sun.

"Remember me," At winter's threshold hoary
You whisper now, when I no more can roam.
I cannot, as of old, with turgid story
Cheat thee, but whisper: While thy heart, my
Home,
Still trusteth in me, be it hence my glory
To part no more from thee while bends the dome
Of heaven above me, its clear brightness giving;
Nor with thee, while my changing lifetime living,
Can aught of smiles, or blush of men,
Or cloud, or bloom of earth, again
Make me forget my Home!

"Remember thee?" Oh, Truabused! for ever
While beats my heart, thy slackness forgiven,
Friends may desert, Fortune her favours sever,
Still must I murmur: "While thy soul, my
Heaven,
Clothes me with truth, a weak reply shall never
By me to thy 'Remember,' then, be given.
So shall I find when, thrilled with all thy praises,
The world sinks down, and Death the curtain raises—
When faints the roar of warring men—
The rush, the jar, the tumult—then,
Then I shall find my Heaven!" N. D. U.

MAUD and ETHEL, two sisters, would like to correspond with two young men. Maud is nineteen, medium height, fair, of a loving disposition. Ethel is eighteen, medium height, dark, fond of home and music. Respondents must be between twenty and twenty-four.

CLARA, seventeen, dark hair and eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman about nineteen, dark.

BESSIE D., twenty-three, tall, brown hair and eyes, would like to correspond with a mechanic about twenty-four, tall, fond of home.

NELLY, twenty, medium height, fair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young man with a view to matrimony. Respondent must be tall, dark, fond of home.

ROSE and MAR, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Rose is good-looking, dark hair, brown eyes. May is tall, fair, golden hair, violet eyes.

YOUNG BACHELOR, twenty, tall, blue eyes, fond of home and music, would like to correspond with a young lady about eighteen.

ELIZABETH, medium height, dark, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a second mate. Respondents must be between twenty-six and twenty-eight, tall, fair, of a loving disposition.

PANSY, ROSE and PEARL, three friends, would like to correspond with three young men with a view to matrimony. Pansy is seventeen, tall, fair, blue eyes, good-looking, fond of home and children. Rose is eighteen, dark hair, hazel eyes, good-looking, fond of singing and dancing. Pearl is twenty-one, tall, fond of home and music. Respondents must be tall, good-looking.

CYPRUS HERO, DARDANELLES FORCES, ZULU WARRIOR, and BULGARIAN CHIEF, four seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with four young ladies with a view to matrimony. Cyprus Hero is twenty-two, fair, of a loving disposition. Dardanelles Forcer is twenty-two, good-looking, fond of home and music. Zulu Warrior is twenty-one, dark. Bulgaria Chief is twenty-one, tall, fair, fond of home and dancing.

EMILIE and ELLEN, two sisters, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Emilie is tall, fair. Ellen is fair, medium height, brown eyes. Respondents must be between twenty-one and thirty.

RUBY, twenty-four, short, dark, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a seaman in the Royal Navy, about the same age.

W. P. J. O. E. would like to correspond with a young lady about eighteen. He is twenty-two, tall, dark, good-looking, fond of music and dancing.

ROGER, TIDGEY and JOE, three friends, would like to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Roger is twenty-one, medium height, dark, good-looking. Tidgey is twenty, tall, fair. Joe is fair, medium height.

C. H. and E. B., two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. C. H. is twenty-eight, short, brown hair, grey eyes, fond of home. E. B. is twenty-four, tall, light hair, grey eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children.

SNOWDROP, eighteen, fair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman between twenty-four and thirty.

JOHN and THOMAS, two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies.

FAIR NELLIE and LIVELY FANNIE, two friends, would like to correspond with two seamen in the Royal Navy. Fair Nellie is twenty, tall, light hair, grey eyes. Lively Fannie is seventeen, tall, brown hair and eyes, fond of home and children.

AGNES and ALICE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Agnes is fifteen, tall, dark. Alice is fifteen, tall, brown hair, dark eyes, good-looking. Respondents must be about the same age, of a loving disposition.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

HARRIET is responded to by—C. J. H., twenty, tall, dark, of a loving disposition.

LOFTY by—Fanny, nineteen, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes.

E. S. by—Ernie.

ANNE by—Alfred, twenty-six, medium height, fond of children.

MORA by—J. W. H., eighteen, fair, good-looking, of a loving disposition, fond of music and dancing.

A. W. T. by—Sweet Ada, twenty, fair, brown hair, blue eyes.

LIVELY FLOSSIE by—Walter.

CHARLIE by—Elsie, twenty-four.

HARRY by—Eva, twenty.

LIVELY FLOSSIE by—D. B. S., twenty-one, medium height, good-looking.

LIVELY FLOSSIE by—Lively Dick, twenty.

LIVELY FLOSSIE by—John E.

BRUNETTE by—W. B., twenty-one, tall, good-looking, fond of home.

A. W. S. by—Milliner, twenty-one, medium height, fair, good-looking.

HALLLULUJAH JACK by—Pretty Irene, eighteen, medium height, fond of home and children.

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